THE EFFECTS OF COMMUNITY SERVICE ON THE ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF STUDENTS AT A MASSACHUSETTS MIDDLE SCHOOL

A thesis presented by
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Abstract of Dissertation

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Abstract

In many schools, community service participation is becoming an integral part of a student’s education. Some school districts are requiring community service as a graduation requirement, and others are considering doing so. Because of a possible district mandate of community service, administrators at Somerset Middle School in Somerset, Massachusetts, wished to determine if performing community service is likely to affect the academic performance of Somerset Middle School students. To emphasize what community service encompasses, the Somerset Middle School Community Service Committee defined community service as a way for students to help others by volunteering their time, effort, or talents, and is performed to benefit at least one other unrelated person without compensation.

The overriding findings in this study revealed: middle school students who performed community service had higher GPA scores and higher mandated Massachusetts State testing scores in grades 6, 7, and all but one category in grade 8.

The research study was undertaken in hopes that the research findings will be of value to the school administration, school committee, and parents when deciding on possibly mandating community service at the middle school. The research design required data collection including the number of hours they spend performing community service and academic records of the sampled students.

**Key Words:**

Academic performance, community service, graduation requirements, volunteerism
Acknowledgement

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As a Walt Disney enthusiast, I have one final thank you that helped me throughout the intense years of study and research. Thank you Walt Disney for your quote that kept me focused,

“If you can dream it, you can do it.”
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**Introduction**

**Problem of Practice**

Community service is an extracurricular activity for numerous students (it is a graduation requirement at some schools) and many school/district mission statements address the responsibilities of good citizenship and community responsibility as well as how students can contribute responsibly to endeavors beyond the classroom through independent ventures and/or school sponsored activities. Additionally, there is a movement on the national, state, and local levels to mandate a community service requirement in order to receive a high school diploma.

Beginning on the national front, President-elect Barack Obama, in a 2008 address on the subject of education, announced an initiative to include a community service requirement of 50 hours per year, starting at the middle school level (The Obama-Biden Transition Team, 2008). The same year, Massachusetts Governor Deval Patrick, who considers civic engagement a priority area, supported a bill that includes community service as a graduation requirement for high schools in Massachusetts, as part of his Civic Engagement Act (Spectator, 2008). A year earlier, Patrick had signed a bill launching the Commonwealth Corps, a program that creates a state youth service corps permitting Massachusetts citizens to work on improving and rebuilding their communities through service (Massachusetts’ First Civic Engagement Summit a big success, 2007). Locally, the Somerset Superintendent of Schools, Richard Medeiros, not only endorsed the idea of community service being a high school graduation requirement, but in December of 2008, he encouraged the administration at Somerset High School to work out the details of a community service program (Spectator, 2008). Beginning one month later, in
January of 2009, the Somerset High School Community Service Committee was formed. The committee consisted of eight teachers from various disciplines, one guidance councilor, and one vice principal. Prior to 2009, there was no formalized documentation of students performing community service or a graduation requirement to perform community service. The committees’ responsibility was to initiate and implement a structured community service graduation requirement. In June 2009, the committee brought a recommendation to the Somerset School Committee that twenty hours of community service be a graduation requirement beginning with the incoming September 2009 freshman class. The school committee unanimously voted to support the committee’s recommendation for the high school and asked if a requirement at Somerset Middle School should be considered. This question sparked the researchers’ interest in learning what, if any, impact a requirement would likely have on a middle school student’s academic achievement.

**Somerset Middle School Students**

At Somerset Middle School, students are pulled in many different directions. Academics, and participation in extracurricular activities such as sports, music, and clubs, compete for their attention. They may also have chores to perform at home, religious commitments, and, of course, social activities. Among the questions the administration and faculty at Somerset Middle School found themselves asking after learning that community service might be required of the middle school students was, how adding performing community service to their already busy schedules may impact their academic performance?
Motivation for this research study was twofold; the growing trend for middle school students to perform community service and the movement on the national, state and specifically local level (e.g., the Superintendent of Somerset School District) to mandate a community service requirement for students starting at the middle school level. At the high school level the push for a community service graduation requirement has come nationally from President Barack Obama and from Massachusetts Governor Deval Patrick at the state level. According to the Massachusetts Department of Education (now the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education), some school districts in Massachusetts currently have community service as a graduation requirement. In the year 2000, the Department of Education conducted a survey of school districts in Massachusetts to determine how many required community service as a graduation requirement. The results: twenty-nine school districts (12.8%) in Massachusetts required variations of community service as a graduation requirement (Education, 2001). According to the Massachusetts Department of Education, this is the most recent data. Then again, because what is considered community service varies from one school to another, the various terms used to describe what is generally called community service, and an inquiry into this topic—researching the history of community service is needed.

**Defining Community Service**

From the early 1900s to the present, the terminology used to describe the activity of community service has ranged from service learning, to civic engagement, volunteerism, citizenship education and civic responsibility, to community service. Although the definitions vary, understanding what community service is distinguishes it from other forms. In every
instance of community service, two elements are always found: the work done is unpaid, and the community (individual or group) is benefited. For the purpose of this study, community service is a way for students to help others by volunteering their time, effort, or talents and is performed to benefit at least one other unrelated person without compensation.

Service-learning is defined by Learn and Serve: America’s National Service-Learning Clearinghouse as a course-based, credit bearing educational experience in which students (a) participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs, and (b) reflect on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of personal values and civic responsibility (Bringle & Hatcher, 2009). The National Youth Leadership Council’s (NYLC, a nonprofit organization established at the University of Minnesota), founder, president, and CEO said, “Service-learning combines classroom instruction with reflection and meaningful service to the community” (National Youth Leadership Council, 2010).

Volunteerism defined by Merriam-Webster dictionary as the act or practice of doing volunteer work in community service. A volunteer is someone who does something without being forced to do it.

A Brief Community Service Chronology

Community service is not new to Americans, Americans have been volunteering for decades. There have been war related service organizations dating back to the Civil War period such as the United States Sanitary Commission, which staffed women volunteers to help in field hospitals and raise money for supplies. The Union Volunteer Refreshment Saloon along with the
Cooper Volunteer Saloon had volunteers who provided support services such as food and a place to rest to nearly 900,000 soldiers on their way to or returning from the Civil War (The Civil War Home Page, 2012).

The American Red Cross was founded in 1881 for the purpose of emergency response and has evolved over the years to an organization that offers compassionate services such as, community services that help the needy; support and comfort for military members and their families; the collection, processing and distribution of lifesaving blood and blood products; educational programs that promote health and safety; and international relief and development programs (American Red Cross, 2011).

By the year 1903, community service was also part of the cooperative education movement, which at the high school level, alternated a semester of academic coursework with an equal amount of time in a paid or unpaid employment, repeating this cycle several times until graduation. Presently in Massachusetts, vocational technical high schools use a similar concept that strengthens ties between the schools and the business community. The businesses provide both paid and unpaid opportunities for the students to gain experience in the field of their choosing which can prepare students to become marketable when they graduate from the vocational technical high school. At the university level, cooperative learning provided students with experiences at home and abroad to help them develop the knowledge, awareness, perspective, and confidence to transform their lives (Northeastern University, 2012). Northeastern University was one of the pioneer universities more than 100 years ago to bring this concept to fruition. Although not the definition of community service, it was a way to have
community involvement within the schools and universities to provide work-based learning experiences for the students. When the students cooperative education experience in unpaid, some schools consider this experience as part of the students community service requirement.

**War Related Service Organizations**

War related service organizations continued to evolve as did the concept of community service. In 1910 the American philosopher William James wrote an essay entitled, “The Moral Equivalent of War” in which he envisioned non-military national service. His concept is regarded by some as the origin of the idea of organized national service (Learn and Serve, America's National Service-Learning Clearinghouse). James stated,

Strenuous honor and disinterestedness abound everywhere. Priests and medical men are in a fashion educated to it, and we should all feel some degree if it is imperative if we were conscious of our work as an obligatory service to the state. We should be owned, as soldiers are by the army, and our pride would rise accordingly. (James, 2011)

There continues to be varied reactions to this essay, some agree with James that society must remain aggressive in wars or society will become weak and yielding. There are others who adamantly disagree with James, feeling society will survive even if people don’t think like a soldier. However, most agree that service to others is important to one’s self and to others.

The American philosopher, psychologist and educational reformer, John Dewey, also encouraged the concept of community service. He felt service to be a democratic idea in its generic social sense (Dewey, John, 1916). During the time between World War I and World War
II, Dewey wrote a series of books articulating his philosophical beliefs, with many about social change and service to those of need.

Continuance of War Related Service Organizations

During the World War I era not only did the American Red Cross provide volunteer service, other organizations such as National League for Women’s Service and the Pennsylvania Railroad Woman’s Division of War Relief had volunteers who helped provide food by canning to feed the American servicemen, knitting of hats, gloves, vest, and jackets to help keep the servicemen warm.

Between 1910 and 1929, the Boy Scouts of America and Girls Scouts of America were formed. Both groups performed various types of community service that continues in our cities and towns today. Today the Boy Scouts of America website states,

“Doing service projects together is one way that Cub Scouts keep their promise ‘to help other people.’ While a Scout should do his best to help other people every day, a group service project is a bigger way to help people. While you’re giving service, you’re learning to work together with others to do something that’s good for your community.” (Boy Scouts of America, 2009)

The website also lists examples of activities Cub Scouts can do such as; helping the natural world by picking up litter around your neighborhood, cleaning up trash, planting, recycling, helping the community by collecting food for food banks, making cards for a care center, shoveling snow or raking leaves for seniors, helping chartered organizations with cleanup projects, setting up events, or handing out programs (Boy Scouts of America, 2009). There are
several Somerset Middle School boys active in the Boy Scouts of American as there are girls in the American Girl Scout Association. Through these organizations, many of the students perform community service. One example is an annual holiday hat, mittens, and coat drive sponsored by the students who are in the Girl Scouts of America local troop. Another is the local beach cleanup sponsored by the Boy Scouts of America local troop. Both organizations have encouraged their members to perform community service in partnership with the school community service committee.

In the early 1930s, YMCA and YWCA groups volunteered throughout the difficult times of the Great Depression, and then later during WWII. Today YMCA references their commitment to social responsibility by giving back and providing support to move people and communities forward (YMCA of Central Ohio, 2011). The YMCA’s examples of volunteering by providing child care, diabetes programs, and any service helping to provide a better quality of life for those in need.

Continuing to 1960, Presidential candidate, John F. Kennedy, called for the establishment of the Peace Corps, and Congress did so after he was inaugurated. Today the Peace Corps mission is the same as it was in 1960, to promote world peace and friendship. A volunteer in the Peace Corps could help with education by introducing teaching methodologies, or engage in outreach programs geared to helping at-risk children, or be a health volunteer and promote awareness issues, or agriculture, environment, and food security (Peace Corps, 2009).

Shortly after in 1964, President Lyndon B. Johnson proposed VISTA, Volunteers in Service to America, as the domestic version of the Peace Corps. Volunteers would serve in
United States communities, focusing on enriching educational employment opportunities and vocational training for underprivileged citizens. Upon its creation, President Johnson stated, “The initials of your organization spell VISTA. It is an appropriate name, for you will be opening up new vistas of hope for the poor, achievement for yourself, greatness for your Nation, the Nation you serve.” (Peters & Woolley)

The concept of VISTA was enhanced by Michigan State University in 1971 when they established the National Student Volunteer Program, later to be called the Service-Learning Center. The Michigan State program is similar to the cooperative education program at Northeastern University but with the addition of volunteerism. This was the first program of its kind that looked for voluntary service to be part of the curriculum (Outline History of Michigan State University, 2007). The Center for Service-Learning and Civic Engagement at Michigan State University celebrated their forty-year anniversary. In a press release from Michigan State University, dated April 1, 2008 it was stated, “the Center for Service-Learning and Civic Engagement (CSLCE), is the oldest, continuously operating service-learning center in the country. From its inception, the CSLCE, a university-wide initiative, has worked closely with MSU colleges, academic departments, student affairs and services units, pre-college programs and others to offer mutually beneficial, quality service, service-learning and civic engagement opportunities linking faculty, staff, and students with community.” It was also mentioned that, “In 2006-2007 the CSLCE received and accommodated 13,825 MSU student applications for service and 417 not-for-profit community partners utilized service-learning support.” (Michigan State University, 2010)
The evolutional timeline continued through the 1980’s and 1990’s, with President George W. Bush creating the Office of National Service to foster volunteering in 1990. Also in 1990 President George W. Bush signed the National and Community Service Act which addressed the multiple facets of community service. This act provided $64 million in grants for community service programs like Serve America (now named Learn and Serve America). In 1993, President Bill Clinton signed the National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993, and this was followed in 1994 by Congress passing the King Holiday and Service Act, organizing Martin Luther King Day as a Day of Service. Most recently, in April of 2009, President Barack Obama signed into law the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act. The Serve America Act builds on the National and Community Service Act of 1990 and the Domestic Volunteer Service Act of 1973. This act gives opportunities for Americans to serve, to focus on national issues, to be a mechanism for social innovation, and to support the nonprofit sector. The act also creates new initiatives to increase service opportunities for all Americans (Kittredge, 2009). President Barack Obama also initiated the United We Serve initiative by calling on all Americans to participate in the nation’s recovery and renewal by serving in their communities. “United We Serve recognizes that our nation’s progress and prosperity depends on the active involvement of citizens. Everyone has the power to make a difference and all of us should try.” (Corporation for National and Community Service, 2012). Under the umbrella of United We Serve are initiatives such as Let’s Read Lets Move, which calls on Americans to participate in combating reading loss and childhood obesity through volunteering and service this summer. The second initiative is Veterans and Military Families, focusing efforts to help these families. The third initiative is My
American Story that encourages American to share their stories of service. The overarching Corporation for National and Community Service is a federal agency that engages more than five million Americans in service. The corporations’ mission is to improve lives, strengthen communities, and foster civic engagement through service and volunteering.

**National Requirements**

Taking into account this research project is concerned with community service and not service learning, research on service learning is relevant to a consideration of the impact of community service. The Education Commission of the States in March 2001 released a 50 state policy look at community service called “Service-Learning Policy Scan” and found that seven states (Arkansas, Connecticut, Delaware, Minnesota, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, Wisconsin) permitted community service or service-learning activities to be applied toward high school graduation requirements. The Education Commission of the States also noted that all 50 states have received funds from the Corporation for National and Community Service to implement service-learning programs (Learn and Serve America) through their State Departments of Education.

In 2010 and 2011, the National Center for Learning and Citizenship conducted a new 50-state policy scan on service learning and community service. The report showed a dramatic difference from the 2000 report in relation to service learning and community service.

- In 2000, 27 states had some mention of service-learning in state policy; by 2011, that number jumped to 42 states
Currently, 18 states award credit toward graduation for service-learning or community service, up from seven states in 2000.

A comparison of both the 2000 and 2011 National Center for Learning and Citizenship reports are depicted in the following table.

**Table 1- Comparison of two Reports from the National Center for Learning and Citizenship**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>2000</th>
<th>2011</th>
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<tr>
<td>Seven states permit</td>
<td>Seven states permit service-learning activities or community service to be applied toward high school graduation requirements.</td>
<td>Eighteen states award credit toward graduation for service-learning or community service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One state includes</td>
<td>In seven states, districts are explicitly authorized to adopt a service requirement for graduation.</td>
<td>Eighteen states tie service-learning or community service to student achievement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ten states encourage</td>
<td>Ten states encourage the use of service-learning as a mechanism for increasing student achievement and engagement.</td>
<td>Thirty states identify service-learning or community service as a means of preparing students for the workplace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Six states include</td>
<td>Six states include service-learning in the state's education standards</td>
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In 2010, the Corporation for National and Community Service released the following data on volunteering and civic engagement called, *Volunteering in America*. The data was a collection of yearly volunteer rates from 2003 to 2010. One of the comparisons was of all Americans to young adults between the ages of 16 and 19. As the following chart depicts the percentage of total volunteers and young adult volunteers had less than a 3% change from 2003 in 2010. Notable, of the 62.8 million Americans volunteering in 2010, 21.9 percent were young adults between the ages of 16 and 19. Another comparison was total number of volunteers in
each state. The findings showed that Massachusetts is slightly higher than the national percentages with 28.5% compared to 26.3% in 2010 and Massachusetts young adult volunteer rate ranking 18th out of the 50 states. (The Corporation for National and Community Service, 2011). Although the study did not show the volunteer rate for middle school students, the overall findings on the number of volunteers was relevant to the researcher.

**Chart 1 - Volunteer Rate of Young Adults and Americans**

![Volunteer Rate Chart]

**State Requirements**

In a report by the Education Commission of the States in 2012, *Service-Learning in the United States: Status of Institutionalization* Massachusetts state statute (Mass. Gen. Laws ch. 69, § 1A) was highlighted for addressing service-learning and community service. The report noted that community service activities are among the items that must be included in the Massachusetts Commissioner of Educations five-year master plan (Education Commission of the States, 2011). The report also referenced service-learning and community service was included in benchmarks.
and instructional strategies in many states’ standards and frameworks (Education Commission of the States, 2012).

**Local Requirement Pressure**

An article that appeared in the Somerset hometown newspaper, The *Spectator*, on December 31, 2008, reported that School Superintendent Richard Medeiros stated at a school committee meeting that community service needed to be a requirement for students at Somerset Middle School and Somerset High School (now Somerset-Berkley Regional High School). He was quoted as saying, "The concept is hard to disagree with, how can you argue with giving back to your community?" He also was quoted as saying, “Students could be required to do a certain number of hours of community service each year; this would show them more about what goes on outside of the four walls of the school. I think it will give them a much better perspective of how their education connects to real life."

Additionally, State Representative Patricia Haddad (D-Somerset), chairperson of the Massachusetts state Legislature’s Joint Committee on Education, and State Senator Marc Pacheco (D-Taunton), proposed in 2008 that community service be made a requirement for schools in Massachusetts. Rep. Haddad said some school districts have required students to do community service in order to get their diploma. She said she was happy to learn that Somerset was looking at the idea. "It's a wonderful thing to make kids understand that they should give back to their community. It's good for everybody; I think it's a great idea requiring students to do community service. I would eventually like to see it as a graduation requirement,” she was quoted as saying. Representative Haddad continued “individual students could choose
community service projects or one class could work on a larger project together. There are all kinds of community service projects that students can get involved in” (Spectator, 2008)

**Community Service Defined for Somerset Middle School**

For the students at Somerset Middle School, community service is a way for students to help others by volunteering their time, effort, or talents and is performed to benefit at least one other unrelated person without compensation. The community service activities reviewed for this study were approved and monitored, and performed to benefit at least one other unrelated person. The hope is that if the school does mandate a community service requirement, the Somerset community service experiences will foster a culture of civic and social awareness, broaden the student’s experiences, and model the qualities of pride and respect, which is Somerset Middle Schools motto. The overarching question this research attempted to answer: Whether the academic achievement of Somerset Middle School students who already perform community service differs from that of Somerset Middle School students who do not perform community service.

**Relationship to Previous Research**

There has been research showing various positive effects that participating in community service programs has on students of different ages. One example is a 1989 study by Kathleen Kirby of the Office of Educational Research and Improvement in Washington, DC. Kirby wrote a review on the effects of community service programs on students, based on her research on elementary, middle, and high school students who participated in community service programs. Kirby stated that middle school students benefited by learning to resolve local issues, providing
assistance to senior citizens and child care facilities, and tutoring younger children (Kirby, 1989). This study made no mention of a quantitative analysis of the students’ academic achievement. Nonetheless, it did show that students who participated in community service had higher order cognitive processing skills, such as critical thinking and decision-making. Interestingly, a 1999 study of early adolescence that looks at grade point average and achievement goals, done by researchers at the University of Kentucky, showed the middle school students who performed community service outside of school had higher SAT-9 mean scores than those who did not perform community service (Anderman, Anderman, & Griesinger, 1999). The literature review section references other research studies and the reported outcomes for students who perform community service.

**Significance**

In 2011-2012, when this research study was done, there was no community service requirement; however, community service is encouraged by end of year recognition with parents, teachers, and the entire student body present, local media recognition with name and picture in the local newspaper, and community recognition from those benefiting from the efforts of the servicing students. The challenge of this research was the monitoring of students’ community service activities and the number of hours they performed community service. Once that community service data was collected, the next step was to collect the academic data of the student sample. Finally, with all the data collected and analyzed the research question of how performing community service affects the academic performance of a Somerset Middle School student was considered.
For this project, data on 30 students was collected and analyzed. The 30 students consisted of 10 students from each of the three grade levels, sixth, seventh, and eighth. Community service data made available by the Somerset Middle School Community Service Committee was used and academic data made available via the guidance office at Somerset Middle School.

It is important to note that extracurricular activities are an integral part of the educational process at Somerset Middle School. Students are exposed to numerous related arts activities and have the opportunity to participate in a wide variety of extracurricular activities including athletics, music, academic clubs, and community-based organizations. Some activities such as the National Honor Society, Peer Leadership, and student government require members to perform 10 to 20 hours per year of civic and social activities in the community. In addition, numerous Somerset Middle School students participate in community organizations including scouting and religious youth organizations that also require community service. Because so many students at the school perform some type of community service, it was assumed it would not be difficult to obtain a sampling of students.

**Testing the waters at Somerset Middle School**

In February of 2010, a fact-finding questionnaire about their community service efforts was completed by all Somerset Middle School students. (Appendix A) The results showed that the students had an awareness of and interest in performing community service. The **pencil and paper questionnaire, conducted during school hours**, gave a definition of community service and asked several questions. One question was “have you performed community service in the past...
year, and if so, what have you done” (there was a list of possible community service activities that they could check or a space marked other that they could fill in). A second question was, how many hours of community service did you perform, with a list of possible times such as 1-5 hours, 6-10 hours, or more than 10 hours. Other questions were: if you didn’t perform any community service in the past year, do you have any interest in doing so in the future?

The fact-finding questionnaire revealed that in 2010, 41 percent of the students of Somerset Middle School participated in some form of community service. The amount of time that a student participated varied greatly. Some students took part in organizations that spend a great deal of time participating in community service, such as scouting organizations. Others participated in a single event or activity such as a one-day fund raising activity to support the homeless in a surrounding community. Nevertheless, the results indicated that there were a viable number of students at Somerset Middle School to allow for a student sample for this research.

**Research Questions and Goals**

1. Does the academic achievement of Somerset Middle School students who performed community service from September 2011 to May 2012, differ from that of Somerset Middle School students who did not perform community service during that time?

2. Does there appear to be a relationship between the amount of time (less than 10 hours, or 10 or more than 10 hours) the student is
involved in community service experience and his or her academic achievement?

The study was designed to analyze the academic performance of 30 Somerset Middle School students (10 from each grade level), 15 involved in community service and 15 not involved in community service. The student sample was comprised of five students in each of the three middle school grades (grades 6, 7, and 8) who performed community service to five students in each of the three grades who did not perform community service. The community service was differentiated in two distinct categories, once by less than 10 hours of community service, and once by 10 or more than 10 hours devoted to community service in a given four month period. The first comparison was of academic performance of the students who are involved in community service to the students who are not involved in community service. The second comparison was of the students involved in community service with 10 or more than 10 hours in the given four month period to the students with less than 10 hours devoted to community service in the same period.

The quantitative data used was student performance on previous and current Massachusetts state mandated Mathematics and English Language Arts Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) test results. The Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) is the Massachusetts statewide assessment program. All Massachusetts public school students must take an MCAS English Language Arts and Mathematics test in grades 3-8, as well as a Science and Technology test in grades 5 and 8. Additionally the students must pass the grade 10 tests in English Language Arts (ELA),
Mathematics and one of the four high school Science and Technology Engineering tests as one condition of eligibility for a high school diploma. The MCAS program is also used to measure change in student achievement over time and hold schools and districts accountable, on a yearly basis, for student progress (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2011).

Research was undertaken with an awareness that findings may help students, parents/guardians, and Somerset Middle School staff, better plan students’ involvement in community service at the middle school level and then again at the high school level where community service was for the first time with the September 2009 freshman class, a graduation requirement. Additionally, the research was designed to create a support tool for the decision making process and a guide for the Somerset School Department to make an informed decision in regards to community service as a requirement at the middle school level.

Document Organization

The remainder of this report includes: theoretical framework, literature review, research design, report of research findings, discussion of research findings, and implications for educational practice. The research was shaped partially by the developmental theory, in which it is argued that students learn in a process, and may not learn the more complex meaning until they have mastered the fundamentals. In this case, a student at the middle school level may perform community service without truly understanding the consequences of their efforts until later in life. However, this research may show how a student’s community service experience
could influence his/her sense of self within the school, which in turn may positively affect academic performance. The literature review section considers the effects extracurricular activities seem to have on academic achievement, and on community service activities. The next section includes research design and methodology, which compares academic achievement of Somerset Middle School students who performed various types of community service for various amounts of time to Somerset Middle School students who did not perform community service. The final sections report the research findings and implications.
Theoretical Framework

The origins of developmental theory, which help inform this proposed study of how performing community service may affect a students’ academic performance, can be traced to Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746-1827), who stated that children learn best by experience and handling concrete objects, guided by the maternal power of educators (Reese, 2001) and to Jean Piaget (1896-1980), one of the most influential researchers in the area of developmental psychology during the 20th century. He believed in our ability to do abstract symbolic reasoning. Piaget's views are often compared with those of Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934), who looked more to social interaction as the primary source of cognition and behavior. They felt that students can learn outside of the classroom and use their life experiences to enhance their learning. An example of developmental theory, when a student volunteers his or her time teaching basic computer skills at a senior citizens center, he or she is not only helping the senior citizen, but is also enhancing his or her own computer skills while engaging in social interaction. This is a life experience not learned in the classroom.

What a student is exposed to at a critical developmental stage will help that student progress effectively to the next stage. Both Jerome Bruner, an American psychologist and author of several books on cognitive revolution in the field of education, and Lev Vygotsky, a Russian psychologist who believed in a social cultural theory, argue that the physical, historical, and emotional interactions from a student’s past are the building blocks that support his/her future learning. This theory suggests that if a student feels emotionally connected to an extracurricular activity such as community service, then performing community service may
improve the student’s academic performance. Moreover, learning does not take place in the classroom alone; it takes place after school, on the weekends, on the playing field, in the music room, at the art gallery or museums, at home, and elsewhere.

**Dewey and Community Service**

John Dewey’s contention that learning is a process and must begin with experience and relate to the student’s interest (Dewey, 2001) could support involvement in community service. Additionally, Dewey’s work on education found that the habits of democracy are most effectively achieved when students, educators, and community members actively work together to address society’s needs (Dewey, John, 1916). Dewey also suggests the possibility of stimulating academic and social development through actions directed towards the welfare of others (Dewey, John, 1916). In 1996, John Saltmarsh from Northeastern University, published an article in the *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning* titled, Education for Critical Citizenship: John Dewey’s Contribution to the Pedagogy of Community Service Learning. Saltmarsh stated, “Dewey didn’t specifically address community service learning, he did contribute to service learning by linking education to experience, democratic community, social service, reflective inquiry, and education for social transformation” (Saltmarsh, 1996). Saltmarsh thought, “These contributions formed the basis of a cultural and political critique and reconceptualized pedagogy aimed at the development of democratic values and critical citizenship” (Saltmarsh, 1996).
Looking at what motivates a particular student to come to school for classes; to socialize, play a sport, and/or play an instrument, to be on the math or debate team, or to participate in one of many extracurricular activities such as community service, also supports Dewey’s theory.

**Student Motivation**

Many educators contend that some students only go to school every day to be able to participate in one or more extracurricular activities. If this is true, that participation in extracurricular activities motivates students, then perhaps participation in community service can motivate students to go to school. This was considered in “Student Motivation, School Culture, and Academic Achievement What School Leaders Can Do,” a report of a research study conducted by Ron Renchler, the Director of Library Communications at the University of Oregon in 1992. Renchler contended that every educator needs to be concerned about motivation, that motivation is a quality that students must have if our educational system is to prepare students adequately for the challenges and demands of the next century (Renchler, 1992).

**Some Effects of Extracurricular Activities and Service Learning**

Keeping in mind this research project is concerned with community service and not service learning, various research on extracurricular activities and service learning is relevant to a consideration of the impact of community service. The researcher defined the range of terms used to help distinguish community service for this study on page 10.
The 2008 Massachusetts Interscholastic Athletic Association (MIAA) report, *The Case for High School Activities*, offers an excellent example of how extracurricular activities can have a positive effect on students. The MIAA states that the student who is involved in an extracurricular activity appears happier and tends to enjoy his or her school experience more than the student who does not get involved in any extracurricular activity. Since this is the case with athletics, could it also be true for students’ performing community service?

According to Scott C. Silverman, Ed.D, the Coordinator of Orientation Programs in the office of Student Life at the University of California, Riverside, in 2003, performing community service does improve student academic performance. He contends that students who perform community service do more than build their future resumes. He says they improve their academic performance, develop a deeper relationship with their school and peers, and learn valuable social interaction talents (University of California, 2012).

The National Youth Leadership Council surveyed principals, of whom 32 percent said that service learning had a very positive impact on overall academic grades and 51 percent of whom said that service learning had a somewhat positive impact on overall academic achievement. Additionally, a large majority of educators and parents agreed that service learning could be an effective method for teaching future workplace skills as well as academic subjects (Kielmeier J. C., 2004). Note this research project is concerned with community service and not service learning, but various research on service learning such as academic achievement is relevant to a consideration of the impact of community service.
Involvement in Community Service (also called volunteerism)

A research study, Teen Volunteerism: A Model for America, conducted by the Gallup Youth Survey from April to June in 2000, interviewed 500 American teens, ages 13-17. The researchers indicated that 48% of teens already volunteer in some capacity and would continue to volunteer in the future. The study also revealed that American teens thought they would volunteer about 4,000 hours over the course of their lives (Rudder, 2002).

Having paved the way for volunteerism during his first State of the Union address on January 29, 2002, President George W. Bush urged all Americans to devote 4,000 hours or two years to volunteering over the courses of their lives (The Washington Post Company, 2002). Seven years after President George W. Bush urged Americans to volunteer, in 2009, the United States Department of Labor, using the current population survey conducted a study on volunteering in the United States. The purpose of this addition to the current population survey was to obtain information on the frequency of volunteering and the characteristics of volunteers in the United States. Nearly 60,000 households were asked to complete a self-reporting questionnaire with questions pertaining to volunteerism. The survey questions ranged from ones about gender, age, race ethnicity group, marital status, children, educational attainment, and employment status, to ones about hours spent volunteering, and type of volunteering. A characteristic that the study found was that individuals with higher levels of education were 42.8% more likely to volunteer compared to 8.6% who had less than a high school diploma (Bureau of Labor Statistics U.S. Department of Labor, 2010).
According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, there was a decline from September 2009 to September 2010 in the overall volunteer rate. Nevertheless, in February of 2012 the Bureau of Labor Statistics released the most recent economic news report on volunteering in the United States. The release reported that the volunteer rate from September 2010 to September 2011 rose by .5 percentage point to 26.8 percent. The 26.8 percent translates to an estimate of 64.4 million people volunteering (United States Department of Labor - Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012).

**Types of Community Service**

Remembering the definition of community service used by the Community Service Committee at Somerset Middle School is a way for students to help others by volunteering their time, effort, or talents and is performed to benefit at least one other unrelated person without compensation. There was a need in this study to verify that what students reported as community service is within Somerset Middle School’s definition of community service. Some community service is more physical and involves tasks such as cleaning a local park, cemetery, or recreational area, while another type may involve soliciting donations or participating in a food drive. Another type of service could be community service projects undertaken for as short as a week or as long as a semester or full year.

An example of such service is provided by students from Pottenger Elementary School, in Springfield, Massachusetts, who used service learning to participate in and affect local-level decision-making regarding the need for soup kitchens in their community. Nutrition students prepared lunches for a local soup kitchen while simultaneously engaging in community service
work to learn why there was a need for such a facility. Likewise, at Chestnut Middle School, Springfield, Massachusetts, science students studied the effects of pollutants in the atmosphere, zeroing in on the pollution caused by burning styrofoam lunchroom food packaging. Using their data, students persuaded school committee members to switch to paper products in the city’s school cafeterias (Billig, 2004).

At Somerset Middle School, in Somerset, Massachusetts, a two-month community service project initiated by a grade eight student was a book trade. The book trade encouraged students to trade their gently used book or books for their choice of another gently used book or books. The book trade brought in almost 500 books, which were traded or donated to classrooms throughout the district, the public library, and to students in Kenya, Africa.

In summary, there can be various types of community service activities the students choose to participate in, or they can propose an idea for a new community service activity. The stipulation for the activity to be considered community service is that it is a service performed to benefit at least one other unrelated person.

Acceptable Community Service for this Research

For the purpose of this study, one-day community service activities such as a park clean up or a long-range project such as raising funds for a playground restoration, was accepted. In addition, collecting and distributing food to those in need and visiting a senior center, was accepted. For this study, it was determined that community service may or may not be arranged by the school, may be mandatory or voluntary, and may include activities that take place on or
off school grounds. However, helping a grandparent or other relative cut their lawn or receiving compensation for a service is not within the community service definition that was used for this study. Table 2 list some examples of what was and was not considered community service for the purpose of this study.

Table 2 – Acceptable Community Service

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community Service</th>
<th>Not Community Service</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assist at senior center, day care center, hospital,</td>
<td>Getting paid for any service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>library, soup, kitchen, animal shelter, elementary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>school, etc.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide child care at town meetings, PTO meetings,</td>
<td>Provide child care for a sibling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>parent teacher conferences, etc.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clean up projects</td>
<td>Clean up relatives property</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide tutoring service</td>
<td>Help sibling with homework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participate or organized clothing drive, food drive,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>book drive, etc.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Literature Review

A review of the literature suggests obvious attention has been paid to community service on the national, state and local levels. Existing research on community service programs is plentiful; thus far, however, the relationship between participation in community service and academic achievement of middle school students has not been widely and explicitly explored in the literature. This review will first establish what the term community service means compared to citizenship education and civic responsibility, then review the apparent effects of being involved in extracurricular activities on academic achievement, and conclude with a look at the possible benefits of community service to middle school students.

Community Service Defined in Several Ways

As noted earlier, for the purposes of this study, community service was considered to mean that activity which promises to connect meaningful service in the school or community with academic learning and civic responsibility, raising a student’s familiarity with social issues and addressing aspects of social issues such as homelessness and hunger. Additionally, the Somerset Middle School Community Service Committee definition was used: community service is a way for students to help others by volunteering their time, effort, or talents and is performed to benefit at least one other unrelated person without compensation.

The nonprofit Massachusetts Service Alliance, established in 1991, serves as the state commission on community service and volunteerism. The Alliance’s definition of service includes both community service and service learning: Community Service Learning (CSL) is a
teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities. It can be used to teach students in all subjects and grades and can range from a single student to an entire school (Massachusetts Service Alliance, 2012).

The Corporation for National and Community Service, a federal agency that engages more than five million Americans in service through Senior Corps, AmeriCorps, and Learn and Serve America, and leads President Obama's national call to service initiative, indicates that through national service and volunteering, Americans from all walks of life contribute to their communities and the nation (The Corporation for National and Community Service, 2012). The Massachusetts Department of Secondary and Elementary Education, along with the National commission on Service-Learning, define service as a teaching and learning approach that integrates community service with service learning and academic study to enrich learning, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2009).

**Citizenship Education and Community Service**

Some research shows that many countries now include citizenship education as an important feature of their official curriculum (Mundy, Bickmore, Hayhoe, Madden, & Madjidi, 2008). According to Meyer Bisch in his article, *Citizenship Education for the 21st Century*, citizenship education is comprised of civics education, human rights (civil and political) education, and cultural heterogeneity, where children are all required to mingle with each other
and thus learn about and understand cultures other than their own (Bisch, 1995). Citizenship education can also be defined as educating children, from early childhood, to become clear-thinking and enlightened citizens who participate in decisions concerning society (Bisch, 1995). While community service can connect meaningful service in the school or community with academic learning and civic responsibility, this study is not concerned with civics or human rights education.

The Effect of Extracurricular Activities on Academic Achievement

There has been substantial research to show a variety of benefits for students who are involved in extracurricular activities such as sports teams, musical groups, community service learning, school organized clubs, and even private clubs and organizations. The Somerset community has been very generous in making it a priority to offer these activities and many others to the students through the Somerset School System. The Somerset School Committee and administration, and Somerset Community have stated in open sessions, via the news media, and in school district brochures, that extracurricular activities are an integral part of the educational process in the Somerset Schools. Somerset High School Principal, Robert W. Pineault, has stated, “Extracurricular activities give students a way to connect and become part of the school culture.” Somerset Middle School Assistant Principal, Kenneth A. Day, stated, “The benefits of student involvement in extracurricular activities are clear; students take pride in their school when they feel they are part of the school”. Students participate in a wide variety of activities including athletics, music, and academic clubs. In addition, numerous students participate in community organizations including scouting, local sports teams, and religious
youth organizations. But the possible impact of participation in extracurricular or community service activates on Somerset Middle School students academic achievement has not been evaluated.

**Comparison of Germany, Japan, and the United States**

Case studies of education in Germany, Japan, and the United States, conducted by Stevenson & Nerison-Low in cooperation with the National Institute on Student Achievement, Curriculum, and Assessment, Office of Educational Research and Improvement U.S. Department of Education in the United States, compares Japan, Germany, and the United States in respect to extracurricular activities and academic success. This vast case study is a component of the Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), with this volume, *To Sum It Up*, being one of five publications in the Case Study published in 2002. The study, conducted in 1994-1995, was designed to collect qualitative data on education to help describe the educational processes within these three countries. Discussions, classroom observations and interviews were conducted, and data collected on achievement test scores, and percentage of students entering higher education.

Teachers in Japan felt there is a strong link between participation in extracurricular activities and success in academic classes. According to these teachers, students who participate in extracurricular activities are more serious and diligent about their academic studies than those students not involved in extracurricular activities. Most teachers in Germany valued the teamwork and social skills that students might gain from participating in extracurricular activities. However, some teachers believed that because their students spent longer hours on the
extracurricular activities and fewer hours on their studies, the students experienced a decline in academic performance (Stevenson & Nerison-Low, 2002).

Meanwhile, on the west coast of the United States, the California Department of Education report *Before and After School Learning and Safe Neighborhoods Partnerships Program*, stated students who participated in after-school programs that were part of the *After School Learning and Safe Neighborhoods Partnership Program* showed improvement in attendance, behavior, and academic achievement at school (Delisio, 2005).

**The Perceived Impact of After School Activities**

In 1992, a study was conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics on public high school seniors in their first semester of their senior year. This study showed that extracurricular activities had a positive effect on their overall GPA—students who participated were three times as likely to have a grade point average of 3.0 or higher and twice as likely to perform in the top quartile on a composite math and reading assessment compared to nonparticipants. (Table 3) Other research done by Eileen O’Brian of the National Center for Education Statistics found that participants in extracurricular activities were also more likely than non-participants to aspire to higher education: two-thirds of participants expected to complete at least a bachelor’s degree, while about half of nonparticipants expected to do so (O’Brian, 1995).
### Table 3 – GPA of Participants/Nonparticipants of Extracurricular Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Nonparticipants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Have a GPS of 3.0 or higher</td>
<td>30.6 %</td>
<td>10.8 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highest quartile on composite math &amp; reading assessment</td>
<td>29.8 %</td>
<td>14.2 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expect to earn a bachelor’s degree or higher</td>
<td>68.2 %</td>
<td>48.2 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In 2006, research conducted by Patrick Akos, reported in *Research in Middle Level Education On Line*, found that middle school students who participated in multiple extracurricular activities had a higher GPA (Table 4) than students who participated in limited extracurricular activities or students who did not participate in any extracurricular activities (Akos, 2006).

### Table 4 - Extracurricular Participation and the Transition to Middle School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Multiple Participation</th>
<th>Limited Participation</th>
<th>No Participation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GPA 3.37</td>
<td>GPA 2.72</td>
<td>GPA 2.71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Perceived Impact of Extracurricular Activities to High School Students in Massachusetts

The Massachusetts Interscholastic Athletic Association (MIAA) conducted a study in 2008, which looked at students who participated in extracurricular activities. The MIAA was specifically examining data that compared student’s grade point averages (GPA) to students who do and do not participate in extracurricular activities.
In the state of Massachusetts, for the 2007-2008 academic year, 68.43 percent of all high school (grades 9-12) students participated in an interscholastic sport, while 16.09 percent participated in other recognized extracurricular activities such as music, speech, and cheerleading. Notably, more than 84 percent of all Massachusetts high school students were involved in some form of school sponsored extracurricular activity. This study did not include students participating in extracurricular activities outside of school, such as Boy or Girl Scouts, private soccer clubs, dance or karate lessons, or community service. According to the executive director of the MIAA a follow up study is being considered (Massachusetts Interscholastic Athletic Association, 2008) and the Massachusetts Interscholastic Athletic Association along with the Massachusetts Secondary School Administrators would be interested in the results of this research study.

**Perceived Impact on Athletes and Music Students**

Extracurricular activities have also been associated with improved educational levels, more interpersonal competencies, high aspirations and a better attention level (Mahoney, Cairo, & Farwer, 1995). In 1995, Eileen O'Brien, of Policy Studies Associates, and Mary Rollefson, of the National Center for Education Statistics prepared a brief from the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics and the National Education Longitudinal Study. O'Brien and Rollefson stated extracurricular activities provide a channel for reinforcing the lessons learned in the classroom and applying academic skills in a real-world context, making them part of a well-rounded education (O'Brien & Rollefson, 1995).
A more recent study looked at in 2008 by the Massachusetts Interscholastic Athletic Association was conducted in 2001 by Gary Overton, a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at East Carolina University, in conjunction with the North Carolina High School Athletic Association. The academic performance of student athletes in North Carolina revealed significant differences between athletes and non-athletes. Some of the major findings in the study include: Grade-Point Average, attendance, and dropout rate (Massachusetts Interscholastic Athletic Association, 2008).

**Table 5 – Academic Performance of Athletes vs. Non-athletes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Nonparticipants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GPA</td>
<td>2.98</td>
<td>2.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average # of absences</td>
<td>6.3 days missed</td>
<td>11.9 days missed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dropout rate</td>
<td>.6 %</td>
<td>10.32 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Massachusetts Interscholastic Athletic Association noted, “We are not only talking about sports, according to the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices; students who participate in the arts nine hours or more each week for at least one year are four times more likely to be recognized for academic achievement” (Massachusetts Interscholastic Athletic Association, 2008). The Massachusetts Interscholastic Athletic Association concluded that students who are involved in various types of extracurricular activities have higher academic averages than students who are not involved in extracurricular activities.

**Benefits of Extracurricular Activities**

According to the College Entrance Examination Board, students involved in music programs scored about 11 percent higher than non-music students on the 2001 SAT
(Massachusetts Interscholastic Athletic Association, 2008) and such programs appear to enhance the student’s qualifications in college-entrance applications (Stevenson & Nerison-Low, 2002). In 2003, research conducted by Jonathan F. Zaff, Kristin A. Moore, Angela Romano Papillo, and Stephanie Williams, reported in the Journal of Adolescent Research, found that extracurricular activity participation is linked to lower rates of dropping out of school, greater civic involvement and higher levels of academic achievement. The research also suggested that consistent participation in extracurricular activities from 8th grade through 12th grade predicts academic achievement in young adulthood (Zaff, Moore, Romano Papillo, & Williams, 2003). Additionally, for a child who is not gifted academically, the chance to excel in the arts or in sports can make a huge difference in self-esteem (Needlman, 2004).

Consequently, there has been a good deal of research showing various benefits for students participating in extracurricular activities such as sports teams, musical groups, school organized clubs and even private clubs and organizations. Physical development, creativity, stress relief, self-confidence, team spirit and camaraderie, time management, and academic achievement have been identified as benefits (Davidson, 2008).

Since being involved in various types of extracurricular activities can benefit students in these other ways, this study was undertaken with the intent of discovering whether academic performance at Somerset Middle School could be positively impacted when students perform community service. This information will be of importance for those who wish to encourage or mandate community service.
Support for Community Service

There are theories and some research on various benefits of community service. John Dewey, an advocate of volunteerism, believed that students would learn more effectively and become better citizens if they engaged in service to the community and had this service incorporated into their academic curriculum (Dewey, John, 1916). Though community service was first suggested as a useful activity over a century ago, the incorporation of community service into the curriculum did not begin in earnest until the early 1970s. Only recently have extensive reform efforts emerged to incorporate community service (Skinner & Chapman, 1999). In 2009, President Barack Obama encouraged volunteerism through the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act with a $1.49 billion budget (Corporation for National and Community Service, 2012). This act provided government financial backing to assist in initiating and supporting the possibility of community service requirements in our schools.

Many United States school/district mission statements address the responsibilities of good citizenship and community responsibility by encouraging community service participation and stressing how students can contribute responsibly to endeavors beyond the classroom through independent ventures and/or school-sponsored activities. They do so in the hope that students may realize through community service that they have the capability of making a positive contribution to humanity.
Benefits of Community Service-Citizen Engagement

A perceived benefit of performing community service may facilitate a sense of citizenship. In education, citizenship is used to refer to an educational activity – that is, to the process of helping people learn how to become active, informed and responsible citizens. Citizenship in this sense is also known as citizenship education or education for citizenship. Citizenship education encompasses everything from informal education in the home, to youth work, to formal types of education provided in schools, colleges, universities, and the workplace.

Community service may showcase what a student is contributing to his/her community. It may be possible to see that it develops “real world” applications for lessons, and fosters empathy for others, which may lead to future civic engagement. This was found to be true in a research study published in the *American Educational Research Journal* stating that participation in volunteerism projects and school required community service were predictors of adult volunteering and participating in voting. (Hart, Donnelly, Youniss, & Atkins, 2007). The study also addressed the New England Association of Schools and Colleges standards for accreditation, which list civic engagement of students as part of the 21st Century Learning Expectations. The New England Association of Schools and Colleges provides accreditation services for more than 2000 public and private institutions in the six New England states: Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island and Vermont - Pre-K through university. They engage their member schools in continuous school improvement through a standards-based, self-assessment process by supporting and monitoring each school’s
ongoing progress. The New England Association of Schools and Colleges is a private, non-profit, non-governmental organization that is funded and supported by its membership (The New England Association of Schools and Colleges, 2012).

Community service also reflects global and national agendas (Hart, Donnelly, Youniss, & Atkins, 2007). Suggesting the growth of such agendas, in April of 2012 an international conference held in Toronto, Canada, Engaging Hearts and Minds: An Agenda for Global Citizenship Education, focused on ways to share getting involved locally, nationally and internationally. Many other such conferences will no doubt be held in the future with a hope to promote community service awareness that will benefit local, national and global communities.

Benefits of Community Service - Self-fulfillment

It is the argument of community service advocates that such service can give students a different perspective regarding their lives and the importance of others. Like the Dalai Lama, the advocates believe that our individual happiness will grow if we are selfless and compassionate towards other people (Lama, 1999). Community service is a way students can experience what it feels like to help others and participate in humanitarian activities, they contend, and suggest community service may help students demonstrate various competencies and social behaviors, model civic behavior for other students, and enhance academic performance/achievement.

Ethical Visions of Education, a volume of essays edited by David Hansen, Professor and Director of the Philosophy and Education program at Teachers College, Columbia University, features an article by Kathleen O’Connell, who teaches courses on South Asia at New College,
University of Toronto, Canada. In her essay on *Rabindranath Tagore’s Holistic Approach to Learning* O’Connell states, “The instructor must always keep in mind that there are many ways to learn and many facets to each student, and that the non-verbal, nonlinear, affective side should be considered, as well as the linear verbal-conceptual side” (O’Connell, 2007). Community service could be considered the nonlinear side of learning and perhaps may help students academically achieve a higher level.

**Academic Impact from Service Learning When Connected to Community Service**

The RMC Research Corporation, a national leader in program research and evaluation, professional development, consultation, and product development, conducted studies of service learning between 2001 and 2005 on the impact of service learning on students in grades K-12. They used an educational method that intentionally connected service learning to community service and classroom learning. The studies demonstrated that service-learning programs could have positive impacts on youth in three general areas: academic engagement and achievement, civic attitudes and behaviors, and social and personal skills (Corporation for National & Community Service, 2007).

The February, 2011 issue of *The Prevention Researcher*, includes an article by Shelley Billig, “Making the Most of Your Time: Implementing the K-12 Service-Learning Standards for Quality Practice”. Billig, Vice President of RMC Research Corporation and a technical assistance provider in the field of service learning stated, “Service learning has the potential to impact participants’ academic engagement and performance, civic engagement and skills,
social/personal development, and career pathways because it connects academics, civics, and social-emotional learning in powerful ways” (Billig S. H., 2011). It is possible that this research adds to Billig’s research since service learning also involves performing service in the community without compensation.

**K-12 School Commitment for Community Service over a 20-Year Period**

In a 1979 study conducted by the National Center for Service Learning of high school student community service programs, 92 percent of secondary school principals reported that community service or service learning activities were available to their students. The survey results were based on a sample of 1,800 secondary schools across 46 states (Corporation for National and Community Service, 2008). In 1999, a similar study, which again linked community service and service learning, was conducted and sponsored by the Department of Education and the Corporation for National and Community Service. This study reported 83 percent of principals stated that community service or service learning was available to their students. The survey results were based on a sample of 2,000 public K-12 schools, not just secondary schools. In the spring of 2008, 1847 principals of K-12 public schools, nationwide, responded to yet another similar survey linking community service and service learning. The National Study of the Prevalence of Community Service and Service-Learning in K-12 Public Schools, sponsored again by the Corporation for National and Community Service and conducted by Westat, reported 86 percent of principals reported that community service or service learning was available to their students.
Chart 2 illustrates not only the percentage of schools offering service opportunities but also the percent of students performing service learning or community service activities. The data from 1979 to 2008 reveals the number of schools offering service opportunities has decreased which may have had an impact on the percentage of students performing community service decreasing as well. The 1979 survey results did not give percent of students performing service and the 2004 survey did not give percent of schools offering service opportunities.

Chart 2 - Department of Education Survey Results

Recognizing students for community Service Activities

These four studies conducted by the Department of Education and the Corporation for National and Community Service also looked at K-12 public schools recognizing students for community service activities. In 1999, 64 percent of 2,000 public K-12 schools, not just
secondary schools, were recognizing students for community service activities. The survey asked why the schools encouraged students to be involved in community service. The top four reasons were:

1. To help students become more active members of the community,
2. To increase student knowledge and understanding of the community,
3. To meet real community needs and/or foster relationships between the school and surrounding community,
4. To encourage student altruism or caring for others (Skinner & Chapman, 1999).

In the 2008 study results showed the continued commitment of students participating in community service. Sixty-eight percent of the principals reported that their students participated in community service activities (Corporation for National and Community Service, 2008).

As indicated from the four similar studies, there was overall from 1979 to 2008 a slight increase in the number of K-12 public schools that recognized students participating in community service activities. As shown in chart 3, from 1999 to 2008, elementary schools had a slight increase from 1999 to 2004 and no increase in 2008. The middle schools reported a slight decrease from 1999 to 2004, then an increase in 2008. The high schools, which showed data from the 1979 study, revealed a decrease from 1979 to 1999, no change from 1999 to 2004, then an increase in 2008.
A similar one time study in 2004, Community Service and Service-learning in Public Schools conducted by the National Youth Leadership Council collected data from the 2002-2003 academic year. Surveyed school principals in public elementary, middle, and high schools, were asked if their students participated in community service activities recognized by and/or arranged through the school. Sixty-nine percent said they did (Kielsmeier, Scales, Roehlkepartain, & Neal, 2004).

The Intrinsic Impact on Students Involved in Community Service

The research completed by Kathleen Kirby on community service and civic education shows community service has positive outcomes and builds bonds between youth and the
institutions of our society. Some of the outcomes are preparing students for broad-based involvement in community service as adults, and building links between schools and the community. According to Kirby, community service strengthens student academic performance and self-esteem by helping young people to see the connection between what they learn in school and the real problems faced in their communities and stimulating interest and reducing negative attitudes (Kirby, 1989). Kirby goes on to state:

Service brings together students from diverse ethnic, racial, and socioeconomic groups. It enables students to give something back to their schools and communities. It creates positive partnerships between students and adults by encouraging youth to make the transition to adulthood as contributing and caring members of society. Finally, it encourages a lifelong commitment to the service ethic.” (Kirby, 1989)

The June 1991 issue of The Phi Delta Kappan, includes research conducted by Dan Conrad and Diane Hedin, School-Based Community Service: What We Know from Research and Theory that adds to Kirby’s research. The quantitative portion of the study showed, “Only rarely does participation result in higher scores on test of general knowledge” while the qualitative portion of the study revealed, that 75% of the participants learned more by performing community service than they felt they learned in their classes (Conrad & Hedin, 1991). The authors concluded the study by stating, “Whether service as a school practice merits the serious
consideration of practitioners and policy makers seems to be beyond question” (Conrad & Hedin, 1991).

Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda, and Yee, from the University of California at Los Angeles, conducted a research study in 2000 that looked at how service learning (not stated as community service but relevant to this research) affects students. The researchers concluded service participation showing significant positive effects on: academic performance, values, self-efficacy, leadership, choice of a service career, and plans to participate in service after college (Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda, & Yee, 2000).

In their 2008 book, Comparative and International Education, Katherine Madjidi and Jean-Paul Restoule give an overview of indigenous ways of knowing and learning. They claim “The goal of indigenous education is not individual prosperity or success, but dignity and responsibility to the community” (Mundy, Bickmore, Hayhoe, Mdden, & Madjidi, 2008). If this is true, then students performing community service will not only be helping others but also helping themselves.

Daniel Hart and Thomas Donnelly conducted research in 2007, from Rutgers University by using the National Educational Longitudinal Study to determine if high school community service could be a predictor of adult voting and volunteering. The researchers concluded that both voluntary and school-required community service in high school were strong predictors of adult voting and adult volunteering (Hart, Donnelly, Youniss, & Atkins, 2007).
Additionally, in 2012, the Center for Student Involvement at The University of California at San Diego list ten top reasons for students to perform community service. Beginning with number ten and going to number one. They include:

10. It’s good for you (It reduces stress)

9. It saves resources (the estimated value of a volunteer’s time is $15.39 per hour)

8. Volunteers gain professional experience

7. It brings people together

6. It promotes personal growth, self-esteem, empathy, and self-efficacy

5. Volunteering strengthens your community (you help support families, youth, improve schools, and beautify the community)

4. You learn a lot about self, government, and community

3. You get a chance to give back

2. Volunteering encourages civic responsibility (volunteers are invested in their community)

1. You make a difference (University of California, 2012)

The Corporation for National and Community Service states, “Volunteerism accrues considerable benefits for most of its participants, young and old alike” (Corporation for National and Community Service, 2008). A 2007, study conducted by The Corporation for National and Community Service, titled The Health Benefits of Volunteering noted that there was a strong
relationship between volunteering and health. Volunteers had a lower mortality rate, greater functional ability, and lower rates of depression later in life than those who did not volunteer (The Corporation for National and Community Service, 2007). The study also indicated that people who volunteered about 100 hours per year were most likely to exhibit positive health outcomes (Corporation for National & Community Service, 2007).

In a report, Community Service Engagement: How our students benefit from this service and how to encourage them to pursue community service, Creighton University Professor Maya Khanna states, “The completion of community service, even compulsory community service, changes students’ attitudes about their community and the degree to which they want to be involved in their communities” (Khanna). When students at Washington University at St. Louis were asked about their thoughts on community service, one of them, Danielle Hayes, stated, "Community service never feels like a responsibility to me, or an obligation. I love it. Never do I feel better about how I have spent my time than at the end of a day of service." Another student, Amanda Troillett, stated, "The connection and relationship with the community that develops from community service adds an invaluable layer to education." (Washington University at St. Louis, 2012).

**Ethical Compassion**

Community service can be a way for students to develop ethical compassion, according to researchers at the Rutgers University Center for Children and Childhood Studies (Hart, Donnelly, Youniss, & Atkins, 2007). The researchers concluded, “Students who take part in
service seem to understand the importance of lifelong learning and have higher aspirations than their peers who did not take part in service. Not only are they more active members of society, they are more satisfied with their status in life” (Hart, Donnelly, Youniss, & Atkins, 2007).

In a University of Nevada publication of Cooperative Extension- Bringing the University to You, Molly Latham, Area Extension Specialist, wrote an article, Young Volunteers: The Benefits of Community Service. Latham stated, “Teens say the benefits received from volunteering are: Learning to respect others; learning to be helpful and kind; learning to understand people who are different; developing leadership skills, becoming more patient, and better understanding of citizenship” (Latham, 2012).

**Academic Benefits of Performing Community Service**

Martha Daugherty, a professor at Georgia College, and Joyce Compton, a teacher at Elberta Open Campus High School, conducted a study on community service, academics, and at-risk high school students. The study looked at the effects of a school program that integrated community service with academic and vocational courses for at-risk high school students. Daugherty and Compton concluded that community service programs not only caused positive changes in students’ self-confidence, self-esteem, and ability to work with others, but also had positive academic benefits. The high school students they studied gained academic confidence through community service participation. However, the researchers declared that they had little data supporting academic benefits for middle and elementary age students, yet they felt student’s
Involvement in community service prior to high school could have academic benefits on those students in high school (Daugherty & Compton, 1996).

In 2004, Dr. Nancy Fox, a professor at Jacksonville State University, conducted a study similar to this study. It was titled, *A Comparison of the Academic Achievement of Students Who Do and Do Not Participate in Community Service*. Fox compared one school district’s elementary and middle school students who performed community service with those students who did not perform community service. She further investigated whether there was an academic achievement difference from elementary to middle school students. The study showed that middle school students who performed community service activities outside of school had a higher mean raw score on the SAT-9 test than students who did not perform community service (Fox, 2004). Fox also found that gender played an important role for males at the middle school level, but not the high school level. Fox reported that the academic achievement of middle school male students who performed community service was higher than that of middle school male students who did not perform community service. Furthermore, the middle school male students who performed community service had higher academic achievement than middle school female students who performed community service. The middle school students were required to perform a minimum of 60 hours of community service during the 2001-2002 school year to be considered in the study. Fox noted that a community service requirement is in place at the school system she used for her study (Fox, 2004). Other studies of the possible impact of community service on academic performance have not been reported, as of the conclusion of this research study.
**Literature Review Conclusion**

This review explored what the term community service means compared to citizenship education and civic responsibility, then looked at some of the effects being involved in extracurricular activities appear to have on academic achievement, and concluded with the potential benefits of community service. The research was useful in shaping the framework of this study and enhancing the research questions. The review identified research questions on extracurricular activities relating to community service. Research completed by others would seem to suggest there are many benefits of community service for not just the volunteer, but also for the recipient.

Of consequence to this study, the research conducted by Fox showed that middle school students who performed community service activities academically performed better than middle school students who did not perform community service (Fox, 2004). Fox’s study indicated that the gender of a middle school student who participated in community service did make a significant difference. The research indicated the middle school females who participated in community service activities had a lower academic achievement than middle school male students (Fox, 2004).

At the same time, the literature review showed a heightened sense of personal and ethical responsibility (Hart, Donnelly, Youniss, & Atkins, 2007), positive attitudes toward those served (Khanna), enhanced self-esteem (Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda, & Yee, 2000), future engagement in political and civic interaction (Kirby, 1989) and that students want to feel successful.
Examples of student success described in research that has been done on community service and service learning were offered in the context of school sponsored extracurricular activities, scouting, religious groups, a town sports league, or community service activities. Understanding these successes and realizing there may be a connection between students performing community service and academic success are reasons to conduct this research project.
Research Design

This section presents the research questions that were considered and the methods that were used. The purpose of this study was to examine the possible influence of participation in documented community service on the academic achievement of students who attended Somerset Middle School during the 2011-2012 academic year. The results of this research proposal better informed administration, school committee members, parent/guardians, and the community service committee about possible benefits of performing community service at the middle school level, prior to a possible community service mandate at Somerset Middle School. The results of this study were shared with the community service committee at Somerset Berkley Regional High School to help them make an informed decision as to the number of community service hours that should be required at the high school level for graduation. Currently the high school requires 20 hours of community service within four years as a graduation requirement. As of the spring of 2012, the Somerset School District school committee was again in the process of reviewing whether to mandate community service at the middle school level.

The research design required data collection about the number of hours the students spent performing community service, about performance on the state mandated Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) Mathematics and English Language Arts test results, and on the academic grades of the sampled students. The Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) is designed to meet the requirements of the Massachusetts Education Reform Law of 1993. This law stipulates that the testing program must
test all public school students in Massachusetts, including students with disabilities and English Language Learner students;

- measure performance based on the Massachusetts Curriculum Framework learning standards;

- report on the performance of individual students, schools, and districts.

All Massachusetts public school students must take an MCAS English Language Arts and Mathematics test in grades 3-8 as well as a Science and Technology test in grades 5 and 8. Additionally the students must pass the grade 10 tests in English Language Arts (ELA), Mathematics and one of the four high school Science and Technology Engineering tests as one condition of eligibility for a high school diploma. The MCAS program also measures change in student achievement over time and hold schools and districts accountable, on a yearly basis, for student progress (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2011).

Research Questions:

1. Does the academic achievement of Somerset Middle School students who performed community service from September 2011 to May 2012, differ from that of Somerset Middle School students who did not perform community service during that time?

2. Does there appear to be a relationship between the amount of time (less than 10 hours, or 10 or more than 10 hours) the student is involved in community service experience and his or her academic achievement?
Site and Participants

As Somerset Middle School students may soon have a community service requirement imposed on them by the district school committee, the researcher had a vested interest in knowing what impact, if any, there appeared to be between the community service that is currently performed by students and their academic achievement. The sample size used for this study was 30 students, consisting of 15 students who performed community service between September 2011 and May 2012, and 15 students who did not perform community service during the same time period. Of the 15 students who did perform community service, five were from grade 6, five from grade 7, and five from grade 8. The same was true of the 15 students who did not perform community service. With the assistance of the school’s community service committee, the data needed to complete the study was accessed and evaluated. Feasibility was necessary for this study to be implemented, which supports the rationale for using Somerset Middle School as the site.

Community/School Demographics

Somerset Middle School is a public school located in Somerset, Massachusetts. The town of Somerset is 7.1 square miles in area and contains 15 miles of waterfront. Somerset is a suburban community of primarily single-family homes with 17,489 residents. According to the 2010-2011 Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education state data, approximately 94% of Somerset's population is white, with a small percentage of Hispanics, Afro-Americans, Asians, and non-Hispanics.
The school district consists of four elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school. A full day kindergarten program, and preschool programs are provided by the district. Fifty-two percent are male students and forty-eight percent are female students, with a total district enrollment of 2,794 students in pre-K to grade 12. The district student teacher ratio is 15.8 students to teacher, while the Somerset Middle School student teacher ratio is 32.3 students to teacher. In 2010-2011 the K-12 total school budget was $33,980,585 with a per-pupil expenditure of $12,272 per pupil. Beginning in July 2011, the high school was no longer known as Somerset High School, but is now in a separate district and known as Somerset-Berkley Regional High School. For the past 24 years Berkley has paid tuition for their students to attend Somerset High School. For the past two years, Berkley and Somerset have worked on an agreement to form a combined high school. The hard work of the two school districts and towns came to realization on July 1, 2011.

The K-8 school budget for 2011-2012 academic year was $18,982,000. Since 2005 the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education state data shows that Somerset School district has met adequate yearly progress in Mathematics and English Language Arts. Post-graduate data for 2009-2010 indicates that 84.4% of the students attended an institution of higher education.

For the past five years, the total student enrollment of Somerset Middle School has been between 585 and 610 in grades six, seven and eight. The participants in this study were students in grades six, seven, and eight who attend Somerset Middle School. Two groups of students
were considered, those who participated in documented community service, and those who did not participate in documented community service. Students were identified as having participated in community service by the researcher. The Somerset Middle School Community Service Committee helped gather the data needed for this project. The data consists of selected student documented community service hours, selected student Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) results, and selected student end of year grade point average.

The study further identified those students who participate in documented community service by the amount of time they performed community service in a given time period. The academic performance of 30 Somerset Middle School students, 5 from each grade level, 15 who were involved in community service and 15 not involved in community service, were compared by the researcher. The student scores on the most current Mathematics and English Language Arts test results from Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) and grade point average from September 2011 to May 2012 were used.

The student sample of five students in each of the three middle school grades (grades 6, 7, and 8) who perform community service was compared to five students in each of the three grades who did not perform community service. The community service was differentiated in two distinct categories, once by less than 10 hours of community service, and once by 10 or more than 10 hours devoted to community service in the given eight month period. The first comparison was of the academic performance of the students who were involved in community service to the students who were not involved in community service. The second comparison
was of the students involved in community service with 10 or more than 10 hours in the given academic year period to the students with less than 10 hours devoted to community service in the same period.

**Somerset Middle School’s Community Service Committee**

Prior to the 2010-2011 academic year, Somerset Middle School had no formalized program through which students could document community service activity. A Community Service Committee consisting of 11 teachers and the school principal was formed in June 2010 to give the students a way to document their service and also to encourage students to become active members of their community by enabling them to respond to the needs of their community. The committee began by meeting on a monthly basis before or after school hours. The first responsibility of the committee, it was decided by them, was to develop a student questionnaire (Appendix B) to determine if students participated in community service and if so what types of service they performed, and approximately how many hours of service they performed. The questions were variance questions that led to a quantitative research approach. Examples of questions:

- Have you volunteered in the past year?
- List the community service activities you performed in the past month.
- How many hours do you think you volunteered?

After reviewing the responses to the questionnaire, the community service committee saw the need to help students formally document and be recognized for their community service
activities as well as distinguish what community service is. The committee realized it was not possible to know with absolute confidence just how many students were involved in community service or how many hours they are performing service however, the committee did see the need to begin the process.

The community service committee began formal meetings twice a month with frequent informal meetings to develop documents, flyers, list of community service opportunities, and to set up a webpage linked to the school webpage. Currently, a student who plans to participate in community service completes a pre-approval form to ensure that his or her participation can be counted as community service. After completion of the service, the student is asked to fill out a verification form and reflection document in addition to having the supervisor complete a volunteer supervisor evaluation form. The supervisor is the person that the student reported to during his/her community service. For example, if the student volunteered at a community center, then the director of the community center who oversaw the student would be considered the supervisor. If the community service were part of a Girl Scouts of America project then the troop leader would be the supervisor.

All forms and documents are submitted to the designated grade level coordinator. The grade level coordinator is an educator who teaches in the grade level and is serving on the community service committee. There is one grade level coordinator for grade 6, one for grade 7, and one for grade 8. The grade level coordinator approves or disapproves the community service
request, verifies the supervisor evaluation form, and reviews the student reflection document prior to certifying the community service hours.

All students who complete the community service and the documents are recognized at an end of year awards assembly with a certificate indicating number of hours served and a service pin if more than 30 hours are served in an academic year. The local media, Somerset Middle School, and Somerset School Committee are also notified of the student’s service accomplishments.

Examples of Community Service Activities

The following is a sample list of what the Somerset Middle School Community Service Committee considered community service during the 2011-2012 academic year.

- Visit elderly in senior centers, assist with care, and functions
- Assist in soup kitchens
- Tutor students and read to students at elementary schools
- Provide child care at town meetings or parent-teacher conferences
- Assist in pre-vocational collaborative
- Assist at local library or hospital
- Provide musical entertainment at mall or town event
- Care for animals at local shelters
- Community clean-up projects in town
- Participate in clothing, food, book, or money drive
Data Collection

In the research design, the researcher analyzed the academic performance of 30 randomly selected Somerset Middle School students, five from each grade who were involved in community service and five from each grade that were not involved in community service. The students performing community service were differentiated by total hours of community service performed between September 2011 and May 2012.

The English Language Arts and Mathematics Massachusetts Common Assessment Standards results of the students who were involved in community service was compared to the students English Language Arts and Mathematics Massachusetts Common Assessment Standards results who were not involved in community service. The quantitative data used was student performance on the most current Mathematics and English Language Arts Massachusetts Common Assessment Standards test results. Additionally, end of academic year grade point average consisting of four major classes, Mathematics, English Language Arts, Social Studies, Science, and related arts classes of Music, Art, Health, Physical Education, World Language, and Engineering Technology, was compared. The current Mathematics Massachusetts Common Assessment Standards test results of five randomly selected students in grade six who performed community service during the time period of September 2011 to May 2012 was compared to the current Mathematic Massachusetts Common Assessment Standards test results of five randomly selected student in grade six who did not perform community service. The academic year grade point average for the five randomly selected students in grade six who performed community service during the same time period of September 2011 to May 2012, was compared to the
randomly selected five students in grade six who did not perform community service during the same time period of September 2011 to May 2012.

The primary independent variable group (community service participants vs. non-community service participants at Somerset Middle School) was not subject to researcher manipulation because the students elected to participate or not participate in a community service program. The secondary independent variable (time spent performing community service) was not subject to researcher manipulation because the students documented the number of hours performing community service in the given time period.

The study tested the following null hypotheses:

- There will be no significant differences in the academic achievement scores of Somerset Middle School students who performed community service from September 2011 to May 2012, from Somerset Middle School students who did not perform community service during that time.

- There will be no significant differences in the academic achievement scores of Somerset Middle School students who spend 10 or more than 10 hours performing community service in a given four month period than those who spend less than 10 hours performing community service.
Data Analysis

The community service data collected by the 15 students, who performed community service from September 2011 to May 2012, was compared by the number of hours spent performing community service activities during the same time period. The academic year grades from September 2011 to May 2012 was used for the 15 sampled students. The 15 sampled students most current Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment Standards was also used. This helped define if there was a correlation between the 15 students performing community service as an extra curriculum activity and the academic performance of said students compared to the 15 students who did not perform community service during the same time period.

Ethical Considerations

John Dewey, an advocate of service-learning, believed that students would learn more effectively and become better citizens if they engaged in service to the community and had this service incorporated into their academic curriculum (Dewey, 1916 & 2001). Though the benefits of community service were first suggested over a century ago, the ethical considerations of the mandating of community service into the curriculum is still questioned. One reason maybe because of perceived problems in the development of an accountability system for and within each school. Another maybe that in difficult economic times with layoffs and level funded budgets, the question would be asked, “how can the school department financially support another initiative?” Another reason for not mandating community service maybe the argument raised by some that to do so is unconstitutional, which is the argument presented in the 1993
Steirer v. Bethlehem Area School District case brought to the Third U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, resulted in a ruling that rejected the argument, “that a district’s 60- hour service requirement amounted to involuntary servitude banned under the 13th Amendment outlawing slavery.” According to the finding, The amendment bans forced labor through physical coercion, not service that is primarily designed for the students’ own benefit and education by teaching them about the value of community work” (Clemmitt, 2012).

Correspondingly, when the idea of community service being a graduation requirement was presented at a faculty meeting in 2009, the faculty at Somerset High School was split. Some of the faculty stated students should not be forced to do community service. They should want to perform community service, not be told to. A committee made up of eight faculty, one guidance counselor, and the vice principal, was formed to further investigate the matter and to make recommendations regarding community service for Somerset High School students. Since the inception of the committee, community service has become a graduation requirement at Somerset Berkley Regional High School, and the focus of the community service committee is “are there academic benefits of students performing community service?”

The school committee and superintendent support middle school and high school students performing community service, however, they would like to know if there are academic benefits prior to having community service became a requirement in the curriculum for Somerset Middle School students. The results of this study could give the school committee data needed to help them make an informed decision and to guide the Somerset Berkley Regional High School
community service committee in their review of the number of hours required. Currently the community service requirement is 20 hours within four years of high school.

**Why the Research is Important to Somerset Middle School Students**

Although supporters of community service can say it is important for students to perform community service activities, the school committee and administrators felt the need for empirical evidence to support the educational value in making community service a requirement for Somerset Middle School students. The school committee and administration did not and do not question the efficacy and ethical reasons for encouraging community service, but in order to support making community service a requirement, they have expressed a need for factual data that shows how middle school students who perform community service are affected.

**Committee Support**

All Somerset Middle School community service committee members indicated they were in favor of this research project, with many asking, “How can I help?” The community service committee had developed procedures outlined in the data collection section of this report to collect data on students who perform community service, which helped establish the trustworthiness of the collected data. Additionally, the researcher was assisted by the guidance staff at Somerset Middle School in gathering the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment Standards data and academic year grade point average data that was needed. Prior to collecting the data, the researcher met with the guidance staff and the community service committee to
provide them with an overview of the study and the required documents and to keep them informed.

### Concluding Statement

Learning does not take place in the classroom alone; it takes place after school, on the weekends, on the playing field, in the music room, at the art gallery or museums, and while performing community service. It would appear that there can be benefits to various stakeholders when students perform community service. Beginning with the students themselves, community service may be a way to fit in and be part of the school culture, a way to share the commitment and responsibility to enhance the communities in which they live, and lead to a global commitment and responsibility to improve the world we share. Superintendent Richard Medeiros sums it up best in 2008, when he stated, “The concept is hard to disagree with, how can you argue with giving back to your community.”

Previous research has found that being involved in various types of community service can have numerous benefits. The benefits ranged from enhanced self-esteem (Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda, & Yee, 2000), future engagement in political and civic interaction (Kirby, 1989), and a sense of citizenship. This research suggests that involvement in community service may positively affect a middle school student’s academic performance, which in turn might lead to a community service requirement at Somerset Middle School.
Report of Research Findings

The purpose of this quantitative research study was to determine if a middle school student who performs community service academically achieves higher than a middle school student who does not perform community service.

A quantitative method was used with causal comparative research, after the fact method (“ex post facto”). This approach was deemed to be the most appropriate and practical research method to examine the academic relationship between students who perform community service and students who do not perform community service. Causal comparative research involves the collection of data on one independent variable for two or more groups (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). This is appropriate when the following conditions are present.

As was the case in this study, the independent variable has already occurred (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). The groups of students who performed community service and the groups of students who did not perform community service were previously formed. The study was conducted after the treatment condition had occurred, thereby eliminating the possibility of using an experimental design.

The independent variable cannot be manipulated by the researcher (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). The students did or did not perform community service and the number of hours they performed community service were recorded and verified. The student’s grades already had been earned and recorded on their school records.
The assignment of subjects to a group was based on preexisting characteristics with no intervention or manipulation (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). In this study, the students were assigned to one of two groups, (1) served community service or (2) did not serve community service. It is important to note that causal comparative study findings cannot determine the nature of the cause but do allow the researcher to attempt to identify cause-effect relationships.

In this study, data was collected for the groups from the electronic student information system maintained on the Somerset School District mainframe. The statistics included grade level, grade point average, Massachusetts Common Assessment Standards Mathematics, and English Language Arts most recent scores. The grade point average data was exported from the electronic grade book that records all students’ grades. (Grades are entered into the electronic grade book by teachers on a daily or weekly basis. The grades are based on complete course work including homework, quizzes, test, class participation, and projects.) The grades from September 2011 until May 2012 of the courses were used. Permission to access the data was obtained from the district Superintendent. In accordance with the policy of Northeastern University, an application was submitted to Northeastern University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) and approved. The primary study was a confidential quantitative analysis of after-the-fact data.

The randomize function from Microsoft Excel was used to determine the random sample of students in each grade level who performed community service. The randomize function was also used to determine the students who did not perform community service. This technique
allowed for a random sample without accidentally giving preference to anybody. A list of the students from grade 6, who performed community service between September 2011 to May 2012, was put into a single column in an Excel worksheet. In the second column, the fill option was used with Excel’s randomize function. Both columns were selected and sorted in ascending order; the first five students were then selected as the grade 6 students who performed community service. This same process was completed for grades 7 and 8 as well as all three grades for students who did not perform community service between September 2011 and May 2012.

**Standards and Indicators.**

The grouping rubric developed for this study was used to make a distinction between those students who had documented less than 10 hours of community service and those who had documented 10 or more community service hours. This study strays from the research in that all students that documented community service hours were included in the standards-based group.

The number of indicators reported out on the student documentation of community service in the standards-based group collected by this study varied from 1 to 49 hours in the given time period of September 2011 to May 2012. An example of performed community service by the students is depicted in Table 6.
**Table 6 - Types of Community Service Performed**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Community Service Performed by Students in this Study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Book trade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step-up-Day guide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food bank collection and distribution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer tutoring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview committee volunteer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knit hats and scarf’s for tornado victims</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide child care at town meetings or parent-teacher conferences</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Independent variable (predictors) statistics**

The summary of the participants included in the analysis for this study is represented in Table 7.

**Table 7 - Survey Participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community Service</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Valid %</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Missing %</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Total %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GPA</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MCAS-Math</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MCAS-ELA</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Community Service</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GPA</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MCAS-Math</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MCAS-ELA</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The analysis of results for this study includes 15 valid cases for students who served community service (N = 15), and 15 valid cases for students who did not serve community service (N = 15).

**Population and Sample Data**

The population for this study is the 598 Somerset Middle School students in grades 6, 7, and 8. Of the 598 students, 84 students completed the community service verification form prior to May 25, 2012. (Appendix B) Of the 84 students, five from grade 6, five from grade 7, and five from grade 8 were randomly sampled. Of the 514 students who did not complete the community service verification form, five from grade 6, five from grade 7, and five from grade 8 were randomly sampled. The total sample size for this study is 30 students (N = 30) enrolled in Somerset Middle School, which is 5% of the 598 students enrolled in Somerset Middle School.

It was established to test the significance of grade 6 students (standards-based group) who performed community service to Grade 6 students who did not perform community service as opposed to comparing grade 6 to grades 7 and/or grade 8 (mixed group). The participant samples analyzed from students in the three independent variable groups (N = 15) represent approximately 18% (84 students of 598) of the students in all three grades, who had documented community service that were the targeted population for the study and 2.5% of the 598 students enrolled in Somerset Middle School.
Two groups were established for a second independent variable of participating in community service: Students performing less than 10 hours of community service and students performing 10 or more hours of community service.

**Data Analysis**

The first hypothesis that drives this research study is: There will be no significant differences in the academic achievement scores of Somerset Middle School students who performed community service from September 2011 to May 2012, from Somerset Middle School students who did not perform community service during that time.

Analysis was conducted using the software program Microsoft Excel. The independent variable of performed community service was labeled community service and established as a nominal measure with two values: 1 – less than 10 hours of community service; 2 – 10 or more hours of community service.

The dependent variables of Grade Point Average, Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System English Language Arts, and Mathematics were labeled GPA, ELA, and Math respectively and established as scale measures. The value for GPA represents the grade point average as of May 2012. The value for ELA represents the most current Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System -English Language Arts score obtained by the student. The value for Math represents the most current Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System -Mathematics score obtained by the student. Each student was assigned a student number in the original Excel file in order to maintain confidentiality of information and integrity of data.
Table 8 contains the means and standard deviations of the dependent variables (GPA, Math, and ELA) for the two groups (performed community service, did not perform community service) for grade 6 students. The performed community service group had a higher mean score on GPA (M = 3.7, SD = .21) than the students who did not perform community service (M = 3.18, SD = .37). The performed community service students also scored a higher mean score on MCAS-Math (M = 265, SD = 5.) than the students who did not perform community service (M = 242, SD = 17.8). The performed community service students also scored a higher mean score on MCAS-ELA (M = 262, SD = 10.4) than the students who did not perform community service (M = 251, SD = 15.3).

**Table 8 - Grade 6 Mean Scores and Standard Deviation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>GPA</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Service</td>
<td>3.70</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>265</td>
<td>5.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Community Service</td>
<td>3.18</td>
<td>.37</td>
<td>242</td>
<td>17.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Dissertation Sample: n=30, 10 in each grade level, 5 in each variable.*

Table 9 contains the means and standard deviations of the dependent variables (GPA, Math, and ELA) for the two groups (performed community service, did not perform community service) for grade 7 students. The performed community service group had a higher mean score on GPA (M = 3.39, SD = .56) than the students who did not perform community service (M = 3.03, SD= .32). The performed community service students also scored a higher mean score on
MCAS-Math (M = 252, SD = 20.3) than the students who did not perform community service (M = 222, SD = 13.2). The performed community service students also scored a higher mean score on MCAS-ELA (M = 257, SD = 19.0) than the students who did not perform community service (M = 241, SD = 8.1).

Table 9 - Grade 7 Mean Scores and Standard Deviation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade 7</th>
<th>GPA</th>
<th>MCAS- Math</th>
<th>MCAS- ELA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Service</td>
<td>3.39</td>
<td>.56</td>
<td>252</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Community Service</td>
<td>3.03</td>
<td>.32</td>
<td>232</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Dissertation Sample: n=30, 10 in each grade level, 5 in each variable.

Table 10 contains the means and standard deviations of the dependent variables (GPA, Math, and ELA) for the two groups (performed community service, did not perform community service) for grade 8 students. The performed community service group had a higher mean score on GPA (M = 3.18, SD = .67) than the students who did not perform community service (M = 2.53, SD= .84). The performed community service students scored a lower mean score on MCAS-Math (M = 242, SD = 20.) than the students who did not perform community service (M = 255, SD = 41.). The performed community service students scored a higher mean score on MCAS-ELA (M = 247, SD = 3.9) than the students who did not perform community service (M = 236, SD = 9.7).
Table 10 - Grade 8 Mean Scores and Standard Deviation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade 8</th>
<th>GPA</th>
<th>MCAS- Math</th>
<th>MCAS- ELA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Service</td>
<td>3.18</td>
<td>.67</td>
<td>242</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Community Service</td>
<td>2.53</td>
<td>.84</td>
<td>255</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Dissertation Sample: n=30, 10 in each grade level, 5 in each variable.

Hypothesis #1

The academic achievement of Somerset Middle School students who performed community service from September 2011 to May 2012, will not differ from that of Somerset Middle School students who did not perform community service during that time.

The research results for the first hypothesis, based on the quantitative findings is the mean scores of the two groups in all three-grade levels. The scores suggest a difference between the students who performed community service to the students who did not perform community service. In grade 6 and 7 the mean scores in all three variables (GPA, MCAS-Math, MCAS-ELA) were higher with the students who performed community service. In grade 8 the mean scores in GPA and MCAS-ELA were higher with the students who performed community service and lower in MCAS-Math. The standard deviation for students who did not participate in community service for grade 8 MCAS-Math was significantly high at 41.0, whereas the standard deviation for students who participated in community service for grade 8 MCAS-Math was 20.0. Because a significant difference was found between the students who performed community
service and the students who did not perform community service in eight of the nine variables, the researcher accepts hypothesis 1 for grades 6 and 7 and rejects Hypothesis 1 for grade 8.

Hypothesis #2

The second hypothesis for this research study is: There will be no significant differences in the academic achievement scores of Somerset Middle School students who performed less than 10 hours of community service to students who performed 10 or more hours of community service from September 2011 to May 2012.

A split file was created to sort the variable community service by the two groupings developed for the study: less than 10 hours of community service, 10 or more hours of community service. The following tables (Table 6,7,8) and pie graphs (graph 1,2,3) illustrate the number of students who performed less than 10 hours or 10 or more hours of community service in each grade level.

Table 11- Grade 6 Community Service Distribution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community Service Distribution</th>
<th>Grade 6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 10 hours</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 or more hours</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N=5</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chart 4 - Grade 6 Community Service Distribution
Table 12- Grade 7 Community Service Distribution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community Service Distribution</th>
<th>Grade 7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 10 hours</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 or more hours</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N=5</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 13- Grade 8 Community Service Distribution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community Service Distribution</th>
<th>Grade 8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 10 hours</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 or more hours</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N=5</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 14 contains the means and standard deviations of the dependent variables (GPA, Math, and ELA) for the two groups (performed less than 10 hours of community service, performed 10 or more hours of community service) for grade 6 students. The performed less than 10 hours of community service students had a lower mean score on GPA (M = 3.61, SD = .24) than the 10 or more hours of community service students (M = 3.85, SD= .05). The performed less than 10 hours of community service students had a lower mean score on MCAS-Math (M = 262, SD = 3.46) than the 10 or more hours of community service students (M = 270, SD= 0.0).
The performed less than 10 hours of community service students had a lower mean score on MCAS-ELA (M = 257, SD = 7.02) than the 10 or more hours of community service students (M = 268, SD = 14.14).

**Table 14 - Grade 6 Means and Standard Deviations by Hours Served**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade 6</th>
<th>GPA</th>
<th>MCAS- Math</th>
<th>MCAS- ELA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 10 hours of Community Service</td>
<td>3.61</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>262</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 or more hours of Community Service</td>
<td>3.85</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>270</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 15 contains the means and standard deviations of the dependent variables (GPA, Math, and ELA) for the two groups (performed less than 10 hours of community service, performed 10 or more hours of community service) for grade 7 students. The performed less than 10 hours of community service students had a lower mean score on GPA (M = 3.13, SD = .40) than the 10 or more hours of community service students (M = 3.75, SD = .25). The performed less than 10 hours of community service students had a lower mean score on MCAS-Math (M = 238, SD = 8.49) than the 10 or more hours of community service students (M = 265, SD = 11.02). The performed less than 10 hours of community service students had a lower mean score on MCAS-ELA (M = 252, SD = 16.97) than the 10 or more hours of community service students (M = 268, SD = 10.39).
### Table 15 - Grade 7 Means and Standard Deviations by Hours Served

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade 7</th>
<th>GPA</th>
<th>MCAS- Math</th>
<th>MCAS- ELA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 10 hours of Community Service</td>
<td>3.13</td>
<td>.40</td>
<td>238</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 or more hours of Community Service</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>.25</td>
<td>265</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 16 contains the means and standard deviations of the dependent variables (GPA, Math, and ELA) for the two groups (performed less than 10 hours of community service, performed 10 or more hours of community service) for grade 8 students. The performed less than 10 hours of community service students had a lower mean score on GPA (M = 2.66, SD = .75) than the 10 or more hours of community service students (M = 3.52, SD= .40). The performed less than 10 hours of community service students had a lower mean score on MCAS-Math (M = 221, SD = 1.41) than the 10 or more hours of community service students (M = 257, SD= 5.77). The performed less than 10 hours of community service students had a lower mean score on MCAS-ELA (M = 244, SD = 0.0) than the 10 or more hours of community service students (M = 249, SD= 4.16).
Table 16 - *Grade 8 Means and Standard Deviations by Hours Served*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade 8</th>
<th>GPA</th>
<th>MCAS- Math</th>
<th>MCAS- ELA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 10 hours of Community Service</td>
<td>2.66</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td>221</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 or more hours of Community Service</td>
<td>3.52</td>
<td>.40</td>
<td>257</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Because a difference was found between the students who performed less than 10 hours of community service and the students who performed 10 or more hours of community service from September 2011 to May 2012 in all nine variables, the researcher rejects the second hypothesis for all three grades.

**Summary of Quantitative Results**

This study was completed to determine if the academic achievement of middle school students who performed community service differ from that of middle school students who did not perform community service during the same period of time. Data was collected and analyzed in this quantitative study. There was a difference found in the dependent variables on grade point average, MCAS-Mathematics and MCAS- English Language Arts. The following is a summary of the key findings:
Grade Point Average (GPA)

Grade 6

A difference was found in GPA between grade 6 students who performed documented community service compared to students who did not perform documented community service from September 2011 to May 2012. The mean GPA score was 14% higher for grade 6 students who performed documented community service compared to the mean GPA score of grade 6 students who did not perform documented community service. Additionally, the data showed that grade 6 students who performed 10 or more hours of community service had a higher mean GPA than students who performed less than 10 hours of community service during the same period of time.

Grade 7

A difference was found in GPA between grade 7 students who performed documented community service compared to students who did not perform documented community service from September 2011 to May 2012. The mean GPA score was 11% higher for grade 7 students who performed documented community service compared to the mean GPA score of grade 7 students who did not perform documented community service. Additionally, the data showed that grade 7 students who performed 10 or more hours of community service had a higher mean GPA than students who performed less than 10 hours of community service during the same period of time.
Grade 8

A difference was found in GPA between grade 8 students who performed documented community service compared to students who did not perform documented community service from September 2011 to May 2012. The mean GPA score was 20% higher for grade 8 students who performed documented community service compared to the mean GPA score of grade 8 students who did not perform documented community service. Additionally, the data showed that grade 8 students who performed 10 or more hours of community service had a higher mean GPA than students who performed less than 10 hours of community service during the same period of time.

Chart 7 illustrates the mean GPA scores by grade level and by community service performed or not.

Chart 7 - Mean GPA Scores for Grades 6, 7, 8
MCAS-Mathematics

Grade 6

A difference was found in MCAS-Mathematics scores between grade 6 students who performed documented community service compared to students who did not perform documented community service from September 2011 to May 2012. The mean MCAS-Mathematics score was 9% higher for grade 6 students who performed documented community service compared to the mean MCAS-Mathematics score of grade 6 students who did not perform documented community service. Additionally, the data showed that grade 6 students who performed 10 or more hours of community service had a higher mean MCAS-Mathematics score than students who performed less than 10 hours of community service during the same period of time.

Grade 7

A difference was found in MCAS-Mathematics scores between grade 7 students who performed documented community service compared to students who did not perform documented community service from September 2011 to May 2012. The mean MCAS-Mathematics score was 8% higher for grade 7 students who performed documented community service compared to the mean MCAS-Mathematics score of grade 7 students who did not perform documented community service. Additionally, the data showed that grade 7 students who performed 10 or more hours of community service had a higher mean MCAS-Mathematics score than students who performed less than 10 hours of community service during the same period of time.
Grade 8

A difference was found in MCAS-Mathematics scores between grade 8 students who performed documented community service compared to students who did not perform documented community service from September 2011 to May 2012. The mean MCAS-Mathematics score was 5% lower for grade 8 students who performed documented community service compared to the mean MCAS-Mathematics score of grade 8 students who did not perform documented community service. However, the data showed that grade 8 students who performed 10 or more hours of community service had a higher mean MCAS-Mathematics score than students who performed less than 10 hours of community service during the same period of time.

Chart 8 illustrates the mean MCAS-Mathematics scores by grade level and by community service performed or not.

Chart 8 - Mean MCAS-Math Scores for Grades 6, 7, 8
MCAS-English Language Arts (ELA)

Grade 6

A difference was found in MCAS-ELA scores between grade 6 students who performed documented community service compared to students who did not perform documented community service from September 2011 to May 2012. The mean MCAS-ELA score was 4% higher for grade 6 students who performed documented community service compared to the mean MCAS-ELA score of grade 6 students who did not perform documented community service. Additionally, the data showed that grade 6 students who performed 10 or more hours of community service had a higher mean MCAS-ELA score than students who performed less than 10 hours of community service during the same period of time.

Grade 7

A difference was found in MCAS-ELA scores between grade 7 students who performed documented community service compared to students who did not perform documented community service from September 2011 to May 2012. The mean MCAS-ELA score was 6% higher for grade 7 students who performed documented community service compared to the mean MCAS-ELA score of grade 7 students who did not perform documented community service. Additionally, the data showed that grade 7 students who performed 10 or more hours of community service had a higher mean MCAS-ELA score than students who performed less than 10 hours of community service during the same period of time.
Grade 8

A difference was found in MCAS-ELA scores between grade 8 students who performed documented community service compared to students who did not perform documented community service from September 2011 to May 2012. The mean MCAS-ELA score was 5% higher for grade 8 students who performed documented community service compared to the mean MCAS-ELA score of grade 8 students who did not perform documented community service. Additionally, the data showed that grade 8 students who performed 10 or more hours of community service had a higher mean MCAS-ELA score than students who performed less than 10 hours of community service during the same period of time.

Chart 9 illustrates the mean GPA scores by grade level and by community service performed or not.

Chart 9 - Mean MCAS-ELA Scores for Grades 6, 7, 8
In summary, the data showed that the mean score of GPA, MCAS-Math, and MCAS-ELA for students who performed documented community service in grades 6 and 7 were higher than for students who did not perform documented community service. For grade 8 the data showed the mean score for GPA and MCAS-ELA for students who performed documented community service was higher than for students who did not perform documented community service. Nonetheless, in MCAS-Math the students who performed documented community service mean score was lower than the students who did not perform documented community service.

The data also showed that the mean score of GPA, MCAS-Math, and MCAS-ELA was higher for students in all three grades who performed 10 or more hours of documented community service compared to students who served less than 10 hours of documented community service.
Chapter 5: Discussion of Findings and Implications for Practice, Research and Policy

This study investigated the causal-comparative relationship between middle school students who performed documented community service to students who did not perform documented community service. This was a quantitative research study to help inform administration, school committee members, and parents/guardians prior to a possible community service mandate what the likely academic effects will be. The research required data collection including documented community service the students performed, the number of hours they performed community service, and academic records of the sampled students. The academic records consisted of the sampled student’s grade point average from September 2011 to May 2012, sampled student’s most current Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System Math and ELA scores.

Research Questions

The primary research question for this study is: Does the academic achievement of Somerset Middle School students who performed community service from September 2011 to May 2012, differ from that of Somerset Middle School students who did not perform community service during that time? The additional research questions that inform the hypotheses presented in this research study are:

- Does there appear to be a relationship between the amount of time (less than 10 hours, or 10 or more than 10 hours) the student is involved in community service experience and his or her academic achievement?
- Do students who spend 10 or more than 10 hours performing community service in a given academic year period seem to have higher GPA’s than those who spend less than 10 hours performing community service?

**Discussion of Findings**

The review of the literature, the data collection of 30 Somerset Middle School students, and the data analysis involved in this study have led the researcher to the following conclusion. Somerset Middle School students in grades 6, 7, and 8 who performed community service had a higher grade point average, a higher Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System-English Language Arts score, and in grades 6 and 7 a higher Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System – Mathematics score than middle school students who did not perform community service. The research also concluded that the students who performed community service for 10 or more hours had a higher grade point average, Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System Math, and ELA score in all three grades than students who performed community service for less than 10 hours.

There is existing research on community service programs dating back to 1881 with the American Red Cross. There has been research showing various positive effects that participating in community service programs has on students of different ages. Additionally, the research completed on extracurricular activities and grade point average has shown students who participated in extracurricular activities were three times as likely to have a grade point average of 3.0 or higher compared to nonparticipants (O'Brien & Rollefson, 1995). A higher grade point
average for students who participated in extracurricular activities in Japan was also found to be true (Stevenson & Nerison-Low, 2002). The Massachusetts Interscholastic Athletic Association concluded that students who are involved in various types of extracurricular activities have higher academic averages than students who are not involved in extracurricular activities (Massachusetts Interscholastic Athletic Association, 2008). There have been studies demonstrating academic achievement from participation in various service-learning programs (Corporation for National & Community Service, 2007) (Corporation for National and Community Service, 2008).

A study conducted by the Department of Education and the Corporation for National and Community Service spanning the years 1979 to 2008 and surveying principals from 2,000 K-12 nationwide public schools reported 86 percent of principals stated that community service or service learning was available to their students and in 2008, 68 percent of the principals reported that their students participated in community service activities (Corporation for National and Community Service, 2008). With the number of students reportedly participating in community service nationwide, a larger study in the future focused on various student age groups maybe feasible.

Although, the relationship between participation in community service and academic achievement of middle school students has not been extensively studied, a similar study was found in the literature. Research completed by Kathleen Kirby on community service and civic education showed community service strengthens student academic performance (Kirby, 1989).
Dr. Nancy Fox, a professor at Jacksonville State University, conducted a comparable study to this study in 2004 titled, *A Comparison of the Academic Achievement of Students Who Do and Do Not Participate in Community Service*. The study showed that middle school students who performed community service activities outside of school had a higher mean raw score on the SAT-9 test than students who did not perform community service (Fox, 2004). The overall results of this study support Dr. Nancy Fox and Kathleen Kirby’s studies.

This study examined grade point average, Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System Math and ELA scores of middle school students who performed community service to middle school students who did not perform community service during the same time period. Findings for students performing community service had a higher mean grade point average and mean Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System ELA score in grades 6, 7, and 8 as well as, the mean Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System Math score in grades 6 and 7 compared to students who did not perform community service. The mean grade point average ranged from 11% higher in grade 7 to 14% in grade 6, and 20% higher grade point average in grade 8. The mean Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System ELA scores had smaller increases, ranging from a 4% increase in grade 6, 5% increase in grade 7, and 6% higher Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System ELA scores in grade 8. There was a higher mean Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System Math score percentage increase in grade 6 by 9%, grade 7 by 8% and grade 8 had a decrease in the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System Math mean scores by 5%.
In this study, the number of hours students performed community service also seemed to show a relationship between higher academic achievements compared to students who served fewer community service hours. Dr. Fox’s study examined only the impact of community service and did not examine the difference between hours served. She noted in her study that the middle school students were required to perform a minimum of 60 hours of community service during the school year (Fox, 2004) compared to an average of 14.4 hours served by the 15 surveyed Somerset Middle School students. However, in comparison the findings of this study did show the students who served 10 or more hours of community service had higher mean scores in all three grade levels than students who served less than 10 hours of community service during the same time period. The range of hours served by the 15 students in this study was as little as one hour to as many as 49 hours. The mean grade point average ranged from 6% higher in grade 6 to 17% in grade 7, and 24% higher grade point average in grade 8. The mean Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System ELA scores had smaller increases, ranging from a 4% increase in grade 6, 6% increase in grade 7, and 2% higher Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System ELA scores in grade 8. There was a higher mean Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System Math score percentage increase in grade 6 by 3%, grade 7 by 10% and grade 8 had a 14% increase in Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System Math mean scores.
Implications for Practice, Research and Policy

Based on the data analysis of measured student achievement scores, a difference was found between the students performing community service compared to students not performing community service. In all but one case, the difference was shown that students who performed community service academically achieved higher scores than students who did not perform community service. Examining these quantitative results with a qualitative component may have provided insight into the significance of self-fulfillment that community service advocates and educational theorists such as the Dalai Lama (Lama, 1999) and Pestalozzi support. Pestalozzi believed in the importance of learning by doing (Reese, 2001) and John Dewey believed society’s needs are addressed when students, educators, and community actively work together (Dewey, John, 1916).

The findings of this study generate many questions related to the impact of community service on academic achievement. The study found that there is a variance in academic achievement for students who performed community service compared to students who did not perform community service. However, would the researcher receive the same results if an urban middle school were sampled? Do students in urban districts have the same opportunities to perform community service as students in suburban districts have, or do they have greater opportunities based on location? Would students in rural middle schools have the same number of opportunities to perform community service based on location? A much larger scale research study would be needed to encompass urban, suburban, and rural middle schools. The results of a
similar study in various school districts across the state or country may show different results. Transportation to and from the community service site may in itself be a factor in the number of hours a student can perform community service.

**A second question:** Would the results of a study be different if student responses in a mixed study consisting of both quantitative data and qualitative data were used? The study did not explore the possible impact of qualitative data that could be used in future studies even though there was an availability of qualitative data coming from reviewing the verification form developed by the community service committee at Somerset Middle School. The verification form (Appendix B) asked various questions about the student’s experience, hours performed, who the supervisor was, and what was most significant about the experience? Examples of student responses to the last question are: “It felt good to help others”, another wrote, “I learned that every little detail counts, and that helping out really feels good.” Another students who volunteered at the public library during story hour wrote, “I enjoyed spending time with the children, I really enjoyed them. And I love to watch them use their imagination”. The researcher asks if a significance of self-efficacy would have been found, if there were a qualitative component to this study. Would a finding of self-efficacy be linked to students feeling better about themselves in turn give students motivation to academically perform better? Could it be that middle school student’s needs are much different and as a result, they turned to community service where their needs were met and their self-esteem improved? Could Maslow’s theory of Hierarchy of Needs which states that individuals are motivated to satisfy a number of different
needs, some of which are more powerful than others (Maslow, 1943), have an impact on students who perform community service?

A third question: The sampled students who performed community service were not required to perform community service; they volunteered to perform community service. If all students were required to perform community service, would the sample of students have different research outcomes? The researcher did not use the following data for this study however, reviewing the data could have implications on future studies as well as the decision of requiring all Somerset Middle School students perform community service. The researcher found a student response to a Likert Scale question from the Student Community Service Verification Form compelling. When asked to respond to the statement, ‘I believe that students should volunteer time to community service’ using a scale of strongly agrees, agree, uncertain, disagree, strongly disagree, a grade 6 student with nearly 50 hours of documented community service responded with ‘agree’ but added a handwritten response stating, ‘if their heart is in it’. Out of the 15 sampled students who performed community service three students answered ‘agree’ and 12 students answered ‘strongly agree’.

Additional Implications

Based on the research there could be implications to administration and the faculty at Somerset Middle School, if community service is a requirement. How do school administrators find the resources to properly set up community service opportunities for all students and verify the service of all students? School districts across the United States are struggling with level
funded budgets. Will the faculty and administrators be asked to do more with less? Would the volunteer teachers who currently serve on the community service committee have the time and energy to oversee projects for every student? Would the volunteer teachers who collect and review data continue to volunteer or would their positions need to be stipend? If it is determined that there is a need for a stipend position, where will the money come from? How many teachers would be needed to properly oversee a community service requirement for all students? Should teachers and administrators also have a community service requirement? What are the consequences for students who do not complete the community service requirement? Should the current list of acceptable community service activities be revised? Would parent volunteers be willing to serve on a community service Committee?

In conclusion, there are many un-answered questions in regards to implications for educational practice of a community service requirement based on this quantitative study. However, the opportunity for students to help others regardless of community service being a requirement or not will be available for Somerset Middle School students.

As the numbers of school districts mandating a community service graduation requirement, and the state and national push for student community service continues to grow, the question is not if community service has benefits but rather how such mandates affect student academics. This study began from the school committee and superintendent question on possible academic benefits of performing community service at the middle school level and grew out of the researcher’s concern that more is being placed on students, whether intentionally or
unintentionally. Can middle school students handle one more requirement and still be 
academically successful? Because the researcher undertook this study to assess students at 
Somerset Middle School, the findings are limited to this one southeastern New England middle 
school. Therefore, data collected in this study may not reflect those of other schools in 
Massachusetts, the United States of America, or any country. Because of this limit, others are 
encouraged to conduct similar studies that may add to these findings.

This study analyzed data of 30 students from a school of 598 students and found that 
there was statistical significance in the causal relationship between students who performed 
community service and students who did not perform community service on the most recent 
Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System Math and ELA scores, and grade point 
average. A future study could use a larger sample of students that may add to these findings.

The study included an additional analysis of the results for students who performed less 
than 10 hours of community service to students who performed 10 or more hours of community 
service and found statistical significance that the number of community service hours performed 
does have an academic impact. Future studies could breakdown the total number of hours 
performing community service in additional categories, possibly 1-10 hours, 11-20 hours, 21-30 
hours, and 30 + hours. The results may add to these findings.

The study was conducted in a middle school located in a relatively small suburban 
community. Future studies could use a combination of urban, suburban, and rural schools which
may find differences in academic achievement of students who perform community service and students who do not.

The study did not use gender as a variable or student ability levels. A future study that may add to these findings could use both variables for students who do participate in community service. One additional variable that could be added to any future study would be if community service is a requirement or if it is voluntary. With many more school districts adding community service as a requirement, it may be helpful to see the data on student achievement for those schools that require community service compared to those that do not require community service.

Currently there is limited research on academic effects of community service on college students, high school students, middle school students, and elementary students. Future studies could incorporate a grade from each of the school categories and observe the same students over a five-year period. A longer time frame could add to this study by showing if there is sustainable academic achievement from students who perform community service. An early study published in the *American Educational Research Journal,* revealed that participation in school required community service was a predictor of adult volunteering and participating in voting (Hart, Donnelly, Youniss, & Atkins, 2007) could there be other predictors?

**Conclusion**

The finding that academic achievements of students who perform community service are higher than students who do not perform community service may have implications for the
middle school curriculum. Policymakers at the school, district, state, and national levels may consider adding a community service requirement for middle school students and possible all students at all grade levels. These findings may help the school committee and school administration make an informed decision. The development, implementation, and monitoring of student performed community service takes time and effort from many. Given the results of this study, and the time required to implement a community service mandate for all middle school student, there needs to be an extensive plan of action involving the administrators, teachers, students, parents, and community.
References


Khanna, M. (n.d.). Community Service Engagement: How our students benefit from this service and how to encourage them to pursue community service. Omaha: Creighton University.


Appendix A

Community Service Questionnaire

Name: __________________________________________________________ Grade __________________

Community Service Definition:

Participation in community service is a way for students to help others by volunteering their time, effort, or talents. Community service activities are those which students perform to benefit at least one other unrelated person. No compensation is received. Some students already participate in community service by volunteering their time and efforts. Some examples are working in Boy Scouts or Girl Scouts, religious organizations, soup kitchens, clothing or food drives, concerts at nursing homes or malls, or cleaning town sites.

1. Have you volunteered in the past year? YES NO (If no skip to number 5)

2. What did you do?
   ___ Visit elderly in nursing homes and assist with care
   ___ Assist in soup kitchens
   ___ Read to elementary students
   ___ Provide child care at town meetings or parent teacher conferences
   ___ Assist at functions at senior centers
   ___ Assist at local library or hospital
   ___ Other (please list) ________________________________________________________________

3. How many hours do you think you volunteered? ___1-5 hours per month
   ___6-10 hours per month
   ___10+ hours per month

4. Did you enjoy it? YES NO

5. If you are willing to help people in your community, what are some of the reasons why you would donate your time to those in need?
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________

6. If you have not volunteered but would like to, or if you have done community service and would like to do more, what kind of community service would you like to do? ____________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
Appendix B

Somerset Middle School Community Service Verification Form

Name: _____________________________________________________ Grade: __________________

Title of the organization: _____________________________________________________________

Total number of hours: _______________________________________________________________

Dates of Community Service: _________________________________________________________

Contact Person: _________________________________ Phone number: ______________________

Email Address: _____________________________________________________________________

Signature of Contact Person Confirming the Amount of Community Service: ________________

Describe what you did during your community service. Where was it completed? What was most significant to you about this experience?

__________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________

Continue on back if necessary

Respond to the statements below using the following scale:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Uncertain</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Community service was a valuable experience.

1 2 3 4 5

I found community service to be a learning opportunity.

1 2 3 4 5

I believe that students should volunteer time to community service.

1 2 3 4 5

I will volunteer to do community service in the future even if it is not required.

1 2 3 4 5

Student Signature: __________________________ Date: __________________

Parent Signature: __________________________ Date: __________________