

The Abell Report

What we think about, and what we'd like you to think about

Published as a community service by The Abell Foundation

Abell Salutes:

*Miracle On East Chase Street;
St. Frances Academy Students
Achieve Against The Odds.*

It boasts championship basketball teams, yet it has no gym of its own. It must draw its talent from the smallest student enrollment of any school in its league. At graduation, its students are as much as 50 points ahead on the SAT's as measured against other comparable inner-city schools.

Classes are made up entirely of students living in inner-city areas, one third of them below the poverty level. Its admission policy is hardly selective; it admits just about any student who can afford the cost of admission (\$2,900). Seventy percent of the students are non-Catholic. Up to three-quarters of the students come from one-parent households. Up to 10 percent of the students are teenage parents; yet the drop-out rate is consistently lower than the city public schools. Ninety percent of the students go on to college. Over a nine-year tracking period, 75 percent of the students finished college and 95 percent went on to post-secondary education.

This is the remarkable profile of a remarkable school: the 114-year-old St. Frances Academy. At 501 East Chase St., it is too many blocks the wrong side of the Belvedere (now condominium) Hotel, at Chase and Charles. Its home is a hardcore neighborhood in the

(continued on page 6)

Mandatory Student Service For Maryland's High School Graduates *Is It 'Public Service' That Builds Character And Communities? Or Is It 'Involuntary Servitude?'*

"When the Athenians finally wanted not to give to society, but for society to give to them, when the freedom they wished for most was freedom from responsibility, then Athens ceased to be free."

— Edward Gibbon

"Involuntary student service is one of a long list of education fads that will end up on the scrap heap of 'school reform'—hot ideas in their time but soon forgotten in the endless pursuit of newer panaceas."

— Jane Stern

Former President,
Maryland State
Teachers Association

Could community involvement bring about a sense of responsibility to a community? Might this increased involvement and responsibility contribute to a higher quality of life within any given community? If the answer is, in any way large or small, yes, then the idea of a community service requirement for Maryland's high school students holds promise of becoming an important weapon for a community's fight against the decline of its social order.

But just what is the state's service requirement? Why was it so controversial before it was finally

adopted? Are leadership's expectations of the program realistic?

Student service, as it has come to be recognized in extensive public and private dialog, is defined as work in support of the quality of life in the community—in general, in the areas of health care, education, culture and the arts, environment, neighborhood development, and in the political process.

"Student Service" or "Service Learning?"

The Maryland Student Service Alliance defines what it calls "service learning" this way: "Making a difference through actions of caring by personal contact, either in the school or in the community, with preparation and reflection. Making a difference through actions of citizenship, by participating in advocacy projects to assist the disenfranchised or to correct an injustice through petitioning, making presentations, conducting community surveys and presenting results."

Specific examples might include:

- * planting marsh grass and painting storm drains;
- * tutoring and mentoring;
- * taking meals to senior citizens;

and,
* creating running and biking trails through the Rails and Trails program.

In July, 1992, the Maryland State Board of Education, in the face of heated citizen controversy, voted to make student service a graduation requirement. The motion as carried called for students to complete either 75 hours of conventional community service, or 75 hours of service in a community service program designed by their local school system, and approved by the state school superintendent. The requirement pertained to all students entering the ninth grade as of the 1993-'94 school year. Maryland was the first state in the nation to establish such a mandate.

THE CONTROVERSY:

Although the program appeared wholesome, no sooner had the issue been introduced than the community found itself divided along sharply partisan lines. One person's idea of public service turned out to be another person's version of involuntary servitude.

As documented in the Youth Service America publication, "What You Must Do For Your Country," opponents argue that such a program of service distracts from school and "real learning" and/or it is simply too difficult to implement with the limited monetary and human resources of the nation's schools.

Proponents, on the other hand, respond that the requirement sup-

ports education reform and is of indisputable value as a tool for teaching citizenship and responsibility.

The hearings: a window open on a forum of experts disagreeing

Hearings on the issue opened a window for a forum of disagreeing experts.

Wayne Meisel, executive director for the Bertram and Corella Bonner Foundation and a member of the Board of the United States Commission on National and Community Service, came down strong on the side of the dissenters. He argued, "Making service mandatory does not by definition translate into 'supporting' community service. It merely means that you are requiring someone to serve. A problem with requiring service is that it allows a school to establish a mediocre program. If you have a program in which people have to participate, then one is not required to develop a program that is compelling, attractive, interesting."

Jered Ganser, Points of Light Foundation's "Youth Engaged In Service" ambassador, sharply disagreed. He saw all the arguments as strengthening support for the mandate. "The battle over the requirement has, in hindsight, been the greatest opportunity for us. First the battle galvanized a cadre of dedicated, articulate advocates of service learning who educated the legislature and others. Second, the citizens of the state have a more substantive understanding of service learning than they would have had without the controversy.

"Service learning is an opportunity to teach students the skills of good citizenship. Most citizens in

our society emphasize their rights as citizens of the United States—free speech, freedom of religion, and so forth; however, many people do not understand that inherent in those rights is a responsibility to insure that those rights remain in tact."

Maggie O'Neill, deputy director of the Maryland Student Service Alliance, commented further: "We live in a democracy based on citizenship participation. If we do not vote, work to solve community problems, or express our views, we will not be living in a democracy. Students will not learn to be good citizens by reading about it in a book, but rather by venturing into the real world and dealing with real issues."

The controversy carried beyond the hearing rooms and into the press, where some school administrators were quoted as denouncing the requirement.

Noel T. Farmer, Jr., testifying before the Public School Teachers Association, made the point that "in a time of declining resources, (we should) put our money where we're going to get the best return." He said the requirement puts an extra burden on hard-pressed school systems "at a time when the state is already pressing them to boost academic performance."

William Ecker, Caroline County superintendent, warned of practical problems, including verification and the need for extra staff. "The job that teachers have is just overwhelming," he said. "I'm afraid some kids would make a farce out of it."

Warnings . . . and endorsements

And R. Wayne Carmeran, representing the Cecil County Board

The Abell Report

Published bi-monthly by
The Abell Foundation
1116 Fidelity Building
210 North Charles Street
Baltimore, Maryland 21201
(410) 547-1300

of Education, called the proposal "foolhardy, inequitable and costly."

Also in opposition was the Maryland Association of Student Councils. Jamie Kendrick, testifying for the student group, warned that there would be too few opportunities for service in rural areas and called the requirement "logistically impossible" in some parts of the state.

His group also questioned how the students' work would be monitored, and warned of the program's expense and potential liability issues.

An exception among school superintendents was Joseph L. Shilling, Queen Anne County superintendent. Dr. Shilling noted that, "The board already 'requires' English, mathematics and science." He said, "If we believe that values of caring, responsibility to others, and awareness of social issues are of equal importance it would be almost antithetical not to require student service."

The proposal also drew ringing endorsements from individual parents, teachers and students. Katherine Kratman, a parent from Montgomery County remarked, "To be able to tap into the greatest resources we have, our young people, is no small thing."

A student, Jenifer Wiswall, representing South River High School in Anne Arundel County, noted that many students already participated in volunteer activities, and benefited from them. Dan Pascowitz, a student from Montgomery County, commented that students could satisfy the requirement over a long period of time, and that there is an urgent need for student workers. "The only way we can provide enough service to people who need it is to get individuals involved, and the schools

are the perfect place to start."

For Tony Deliberti, a teacher from Montgomery County, the issue was a simple one: "Do we want committed citizens? Do we want to build character? Self worth?"

In the end, the proponents won the day, and the plan was put into effect beginning with the 1993-1994 school year, in Baltimore City and 23 counties. The requirement will be closely evaluated to determine which point of view proves correct.

THE HISTORY OF THE IDEA:

Although the notion that each citizen in a society has an obligation to give something back to that society is undoubtedly rooted in the Judeo-Christian ethic, its modern origins can be traced to 1983, and to the writings of Dr. Ernest L. Boyer. Dr. Boyer is president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. In his book, "High School," (Harper and Row, New York, 1983) he makes the argument that high school students, in the way they spend their time left over after class, serve neither the school, the community, nor themselves — and are unhappy about it.

"Contrary to the general perception of high school students as 'lazy and self-indulgent,' students 'yearn for challenging responsibilities against which they can shape their character, their values and their commitment to society . . . a sense of purpose, of inspiration, of fruitful connections, not only to parents but to other elements of the larger society," says Dr. Boyer, quoting from interviews from around the country as reported in *The Washington Post*.

As things stand in high schools today, he says, "Young people are deprived of responsibilities and cut off from real life activities that are

important to the adult community. They are waiting to be grown up. And they are bored."

"High school students should be encouraged to participate in the communities . . ."

Dr. Boyer concludes that during high school young people should be given opportunities to reach beyond themselves and feel more engaged. "(High school students) should be encouraged to participate in the communities in which they are a part. We recommend that every high school student complete a 'service requirement.' A new Carnegie academic unit would be awarded, recognizing volunteer work in the community or at school."

Dr. Boyer's idea was not widely embraced. By the mid-1980s, after continuous urging by the Carnegie Institute, less than two percent of the students in America were taking volunteer service courses for credit.

The situation was no better in Maryland, and in response, in 1988 the Maryland State Department of Education formed the Maryland Student Service Alliance. The state passed a law requiring every county to offer the program. The Alliance was a public-private partnership, an advocacy agency with a single agenda: to persuade more students and teachers to participate in developing programs to support community service. Their efforts over time, though modestly successful, were thought by the alliance to be insufficient.

Skeptics may point out that if the students were as anxious to

participate in community service as Dr. Boyer's research argued that they were, why did so few actually take advantage of the opportunity when it presented itself? However, in July of 1992, the State Board of Education was persuaded to make community service mandatory.

The Questions and The Promise

The issue was debated publicly — in the press, in open hearings, and in the halls of the state legislature, where bills to overturn the board's decision failed to pass. From spring 1993 forward, the community service requirement became a mandatory component for high school graduation in Maryland.

How do the students intend to meet the requirement? How do they feel about it? What are their hopes and expectations—for themselves, their friends, their teachers? Will a student's involvement in a community give that student a stronger sense of commitment to the community? And, in this same community, will student service in general contribute to raising the quality of life? What about the student; will he or she become a more responsible citizen because he or she performed community service?

The answers, if they come at all, will come in time. But perhaps the best way of anticipating those answers is to talk to students currently involved and committed to the mandatory program.

JENNIFER VAN COURA is a 17-year old senior at Edgewood High School in Harford County. This fall, she plans to work on a drive to gather and distribute canned foods to the needy, and to organize

a blood-donor drive among students and teachers in her high school. She anticipates a sense of personal fulfillment. She says, "I have always enjoyed helping others. On the food drive, for example, I know the food will not only make the families who receive it feel better, but I personally will feel better for having worked on the project."

As for her peers, she says that many are confused about the required service program — what it is, what is required of them. "They are apprehensive. All they hear is '75 hours!, 75 hours!, 75 hours!,' And they say, 'Oh my God I'm not doing that!' But when it's carefully explained, that it is a new way of teaching about life, more of them get interested and excited about it. I know I am."

MELANIE ELLISON is a 17-year-old senior at Wicomico Senior High School in Wicomico County. This fall she hopes to work on an Adopt-A-Highway program. "I know it's important to the community's environmental efforts, but it's important to me, too. I want to make a difference in the quality of people's lives."

In Melanie's view, though she and her friends all look forward to the program, not all of the incoming freshmen are happy with the prospects of required community service. "I like to think," she says, "that my generation is one that is truly interested in public service. But at this point of the program, with so many students yet to be heard from, I think that idea remains to be seen."

CHRIS SAFFER is a 14-year old student entering his freshman year at Perry Hall High School in Baltimore County. This fall Chris

plans to work in YRISE (Youth Rise)—Youth Representatives Involved in Service Learning Education. His work will consist of creating programs that will teach both teachers and students how to develop and implement programs in the school that will generate interest in student service education.

Chris says, "At first I was very much against the program. I thought it violated the 15th amendment against slavery. Now, after learning more about it, I see that it's another way of learning. Jared Hanser came to one of the YRISE meetings. After that, I felt that 90 percent of the students felt good about the program.

"Yes, a lot of kids are against mandatory service. But that is because of their ignorance of it. The teachers and the State Board of Education have to do a better job of explaining.

"Once they do that, I feel strongly the kids will want to be a part of it."

YOLANDA BOYD is a 15-year-old sophomore at Queen Anne's County High School. She plans this fall to work with young children and with older people—both. "I just like to work with people," she says, "I plan to tutor kids, and work to bring to older people something interesting in their lives.

"To tell the truth," she says, "I have a lot of friends who really don't like this program. What they like is to just hang out and do nothing. And their parents don't help—their parents tell them, 'They are going to make you lay roads. They're just going to get the state's work done for free.'

"It's just that the students don't know and the parents don't know. I mean, our community is bad—

there are a lot of drugs and crime, and it needs help. These students can help.

"I believe when they get to understand this, they will help, and will work actively in the student service program.

"I believe that."

JUSTIN GREEN is 14 years old and plans to enter McGruder High School in Montgomery County this fall. He is quite clear in his student service goals: "I'm going to work in the Special Olympics (the sports competition among the handicapped). I've worked with these same kids before, in my middle school. I played basketball and soccer with them. And I want to continue doing that through my school.

"I have different friends with lots of different views about requiring student service. Most, when they first hear about it, definitely don't like it. But the more they hear the more they get enthused. They come to feel as I do. The program makes you a much better person.

"I'll be happier when more kids are hearing more about it."

LISA BISHOP is a senior at South River High School in Anne Arundel County. She has in mind one of the more creative of the service programs.

She plans to visit nursing homes and take an oral history of the personal experiences of war veterans, and of those who lived through the Depression of 1929. She plans to then bring those taped reminiscences into the classroom for use in social studies courses. "This technique will bring history to life. It will be much more interesting and vivid than reading about it all in books."

Lisa sees resistance to the ser-

vice requirement. "The students and their parents have a lot of misconceptions. Basically, they see it as 'forced volunteerism' — but I don't think it is. It's just another course of study, like math or science. But what the teachers don't know about this program, how uninformed they are about it — that's scary!

"When the teachers and the students see the requirement as another course of study, then both groups are going to support it. I certainly hope they will."

SHANNA MARSHALL is a 13-year-old student entering Woodlawn Middle School this fall. She lives in Randallstown, in Baltimore County. She plans to satisfy her service requirement this fall by working in trash clean-up programs. "I hope to organize a couple of friends and go down the streets and alleys in certain neighborhoods. We'll be recycling at the same time."

Like so many of her peers, when Shanna first heard of the requirement, she did not like it. "To tell the truth," she says, "I really didn't want to do it. But my mother talked me into it. And then I realized, well, mostly what I would be doing in my spare time is talking on the phone, anyway.

"So, really, working to help others is better than talking on the phone, or hanging out.

"Not just for me," she adds, "but for my friends."

TA-TIANNA NEALY is a 13-year-old girl going into the ninth grade of Western Vocational Tech, of Woodlawn Middle School. She plans to meet her requirement by working with children. "I want to be able to instill confidence in them, and teach them respect for their peers."

Though Ta-tianna has an ambitious and well-defined plan for meeting her requirement, she is not a particularly strong supporter of the program. "I like the work," she says, "but it should not be required. I can see doing it because — well, I want to be a chef someday, and my public service will look good on my resume.

"Once I found out that I had to do it, I did it. But that doesn't mean I want to do it. And a lot of my friends feel that way."

KAREN TINSLEY is a 17-year-old senior at Middletown High School in Frederick. She plans to work as a volunteer in a soup kitchen, in stream clean-up, and as a tutor.

She feels a lot of students are skeptical. "Some feel that the school is making them do things they don't want to do. And that's not true, but the misconception is out there. Too many kids are into shopping and hanging out. But with explanation and education of teachers and students, that will change.

"But at best," she says, "I honestly don't believe we'll ever see more than one-third of the students genuinely enthused about the mandatory service requirement.

"And we should — we have to. When more students find out more about the program, we will. I *hope* we will."

It is in students' evolving histories—packed with uncertainties and aspirations—that advocates and dissenters of mandatory student service may find their own reasons for continuing, or ending, the debate about it.

Some Recent Grants by The Abell Foundation

Abell Salutes:

Miracle On East Chase Street

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shadow of the state penitentiary. Said to be the oldest African-American high school in America, St. Frances Academy receives no funds from the Catholic Archdiocese, and it is left to raise its funds on its own.

The school's current profile is the work of Sister John Francis Schilling, the president and principal of the school. She does not think of the school's record as anything unusual. "Our success," Sister John Francis says, "is what we would expect from teachers and students who are dedicated to our particular teaching philosophy.

"That philosophy, is rooted in what the school believes is a need to focus on instilling students' pride in their African-American heritage; in focusing on the importance of such basic values as attendance, doing one's homework, maintaining disciplined study habits, and the building of self-esteem. Learning takes place in small classes, about 15 students on average, in a serious atmosphere. It's clear that the teachers care very much about the students and that the students care very much about the teachers."

Students are nurtured in a neighborhood of broken families, high unemployment and high crime.

"But when people ask where we are located," Sister John Francis says with a slight twinkle, "I never say, 'We're a block away from the prison.' I say, 'We're a few blocks away from the Belvedere.'"

American Civil Liberties Union \$40,400
to develop the legal basis for requiring low-income housing opportunities for city public housing residents in the region.

Associated Catholic Charities/ My Sister's Place \$100,000
two-year grant toward acquisition and renovation costs of a new facility to house Associated Catholic Charities day shelter and transitional housing services.

Baltimore City Public Schools \$53,257
for additional expenses related to the expansion of the National Academic League, an intermural competition among 12 Baltimore City middle school students.

Baltimore City Public Schools \$10,000
for expansion of the Cherry Hill Summer Enrichment Camp from three to six weeks.

Baltimore Development Corporation/ American City Manufacturing Company \$35,000
for the development of a business plan of a pilot project to attract manufacturing facilities to Baltimore City by redirecting welfare funds as wage subsidies in order to compete in the international job market with competitive wages.

Baltimore Mentoring Institute \$100,000
continued support of RAISE I and RAISE II, a comprehensive mentoring program for at-risk youth.

Baltimore Museum of Industry \$9,500
for the purchase and installation cost of a public address system for their newly expanded exhibit space and adjacent outdoor areas.

Citizens Planning and Housing Association \$36,315
in support of the Replacement Public Housing Project, creating opportunities for public housing families to live in scattered site housing located in safe neighborhoods with access to good schools and increased employment.

Community Law Center \$20,000
for the Nuisance Abatement Legal Services Project, addressing issues of vacant houses, drug dealing, trash, illegal billboards in residential areas in Baltimore.

Greater Baltimore Committee \$63,000
for a feasibility study to bring life sciences-oriented federal facilities to Baltimore.

Maryland State Archives \$21,054
for the implementation of a multi-cultural education program in partnership with Mergenthaler,

Forest Park High School and Gilman School. By the use of original documents from the Maryland State Archives, the program is designed to improve student comprehension of Maryland history, in particular the role of African Americans in the Civil War and recent efforts to integrate higher education.

Marylanders Against Handgun Abuse \$50,000
a matching grant for a public education campaign about the hazards of gun ownership and handgun abuse in an effort to reduce firearm-related violence.

Midtown Children's Center \$14,040
for renovations to a day care facility for 35 inner city children of working mothers and students.

National Council for Urban Economic Development \$25,000
for costs related to a study to analyze Baltimore's Community Development Block Grant program.

Office of the Governor/ M.Y. Maryland \$8,000
for general operating costs of the Mission Youth Summer Center Program at St. Peter Claver Catholic Church for inner city children ages 5-12.

PACT (Parents and Children Together) \$40,000
for renovation and moving expenses for relocation, consolidation of programs for young children and families with special needs.

Parents Anonymous of Maryland, Inc. \$13,573
matching grant for production costs of a 7-minute video addressing the problems and effects of child abuse and neglect.

Public Justice Center \$40,000
toward staffing costs for expansion of the Tenant Advocacy Project, providing legal counsel to indigent tenants facing eviction and legal representation during summary ejection proceedings.

Save Our Streams \$38,625
for general operating costs of the Baltimore City initiative to clean up and monitor water quality in Gwynns Falls, Jones Falls, and Herring Run watersheds.

University of Maryland Baltimore County \$35,708
for the purchase of equipment for implementation of the Resident Teacher Certificate program at University of Maryland/Baltimore County.