



C O N S U L T I N G

An Evaluation of the

Community Service Program Pilot

Executive Summary

Introduction

This report has been prepared as part of the evaluation of the Community Service Program pilot. The evaluation was conducted over the course of the pilot, the 2006 school year. This report attempts to capture the experiences of the pilot schools as they engaged in the process of implementing the Community Service Program as conceptualised by the Department of Education and Training.

The evaluative process and the resulting report have been designed so that the experiences of the pilot schools can be used by other schools during the move to the state-wide roll-out of the program. To that end, much of the data collection process centred around capturing the stories of the individual pilot schools with a focus on highlighting the challenges faced by each school, the strategies used to overcome those challenges, the benefits of the various approaches, the costs associated with implementing the program and each school's plans for their future approach to the Community Service Program.

All information presented in this report is based on the feedback gathered from the pilot schools, their students, local community organisations and other relevant stakeholders as well as the information gathered from a national and international literature and internet review.

The recommendations offered in this document represent the views of the evaluator and have been carefully considered in light of the feedback from the pilot schools in relation to national and international models of practice.

Background

In 2005, the Government of Western Australia made a commitment to implementing a state-wide community service requirement as part of the Western Australian Certificate of Education. Towards the end of that year, 10 schools were selected to pilot the Community Service Program during the 2006 school year with the aim of clarifying a number of critical issues prior to the scheduled program implementation in 2007. The objectives of the pilot included:

- Clarifying what will count as community service
- Documenting the approaches and processes used by participating schools
- Exploring various ways of working with community organisations to facilitate schools' implementation of the program
- Identifying issues related to the implementation of the program at school level
- Identifying other resources to assist schools in implementing the program
- Informing the development of policies and guidelines for the wider implementation of the program
- Piloting and refining a log book for recording student participation in community service activities.

In capturing the experiences of each of the pilot schools, it was determined that particular emphasis would need to be given to gathering perspectives related to the feasibility of implementing the Community Service Program across all government schools within WA – with additional focus on the following **key questions**:

- *Is the program workable as it is currently conceptualised?*
- *Are there advantages / disadvantages in each of the different approaches?*
- *What are the costs (financial, workload, time) for the school in organising, managing, monitoring and recording student participation in the program?*

- *Are there additional costs and workload considerations for schools related to particular subgroups of students?*
- *Is there community capacity to provide opportunities for students to undertake community service in different areas?*
- *What are the costs / benefits to participation from a student (and parent) perspective?*
- *What are the costs / benefits to participation from a community perspective?*

Methodology

A formative project methodology was designed to work with and build on identified strengths and opportunities while ensuring that the evaluation had the flexibility and adaptability to capture the learning inherent in the pilot process and inform the on-going development of the Community Service Program.

The evaluation was carried out in three phases and began with a focus on first mapping each school's approach to the pilot. The second phase of the evaluation involved a visit to each of the pilot schools / communities to gather information regarding the key operational / implementation questions. The final phase of the evaluation focussed on clarifying the resource implications and sought to proactively identify and clarify practical recommendations for addressing many of the identified issues.

Context

A literature and internet review has helped to place the Community Service Program within a global movement to engage learners (often at the secondary and tertiary levels) in a variety of processes that link learning with community-based experiences. In most instances, endeavours of this ilk have the overarching aims of challenging and potentially changing the way each student:

- sees themselves in relation to their community
- understands the social issues that present as 'problems' within that community

- engages in action to address those issues.

Case Studies

A key focus of the review was to collect the stories of the ten pilot schools as they worked through the process of planning and implementing their individual approaches to the Community Service Program Pilot, the case study section of the review attempts to capture the experiences of each school with a particular focus on:

- school / community demographics
- approach to the pilot
- distinctive features of that approach
- challenges encountered
- strategies used to overcome those challenges
- observed benefits
- adjustments and adaptations made in planning for 2007.

The schools involved in the Community Service Program Pilot included:

- Applecross Senior High School
- Carine Senior High School
- Derby District High School
- Esperance Senior High School
- Merredin Senior High School
- Mirrabooka Education Support Centre
- Mirrabooka Senior High School
- Morley Senior High School
- Rockingham Senior High School
- Yule Brook College.

Benefits and Challenges

As a summary of the experiences of the ten schools, the benefits and challenges that have emerged throughout the pilot process have been highlighted to assist with the state-wide implementation of the Community Service Program.

Note: The benefits and challenges explored in this section are specific to the schools and their students. Those listed here and others are more fully explored in the main body of the report. Impact on the community and other community-related issues regarding program implementation are also explored in a separate section.

Benefits

There are many potential benefits of the Community Service Program – in fact for any initiatives which links community service with an educational context. Key benefits identified through the case studies of the pilot schools include:

- Creates understanding of community service
- Builds citizenship and civic participation
- Forges positive relationships with community members
- Makes 'values' education tangible
- Nurtures planning and communication skills
- Empowers students to make changes.

Challenges

Just as there have been a number of benefits identified through the pilot process thus far, the schools have also faced a number of challenges including:

- Identifying and measuring appropriate program outcomes
- Managing risks without compromising the student experience
- Having sufficient time to manage all aspects of the program
- Ownership of the program and leadership with the school

- Ensuring that students are committed to and benefit from the program
- Changes in administration / teaching staff.

Suggestions for Implementation

The total learning experiences of the pilot schools have been distilled into some key suggestions for implementation which point to the need for: effective planning; clear risk management and accountability strategies; whole-of-school ownership; working from a strengths-based perspective; and exploring potential links with the curriculum.

Key Findings

The feedback from the pilot schools has been examined in light of the literature review and the international models of established practice of community service in education to establish a set of key findings. The issues identified in this section are critical and must be addressed if the Community Service Program is to move successfully into the implementation phase.

- It is clear that there is genuine (but qualified) support for the Community Service Program across a wide-range of current and potential stakeholders.
- There is a need to strengthen the educational rationale for the Community Service Program by developing an explicit statement of the student learning outcomes for the program. In order to develop a shared understanding of these outcomes, they should be defined in collaboration with all the program stakeholders (teachers, students, parents and community organisations).
- It is critical to the future of the program that an appropriate amount of time and resource allocation is given to each school that is implementing the program.
- There is a significant issue regarding the risk management requirements inherent in coordinating the program.

- Students who provided feedback suggested that it is important to them to be involved in meaningful activities which connect to their learning.
- Those who have linked to the curriculum are strong advocates for this approach.
- The on-going PD support for the pilot schools has been identified as critical to the pilot experience and will need to continue in some form.
- It has become exceedingly clear that the leadership at each school has been critical to the implementation of the pilot.
- It is important for there to be a clear vision for: how the program fits with the other aims of the school; how it can be implemented in ways that are of benefit to all involved and what counts as community service.
- Each pilot school has reported that effective planning is critical to the implementation of the program.
- Effectively combining community service and learning is a process-based endeavour and there must be an expectation that each school coming on board with the program will need to experience its own journey – there are no real shortcuts.
- The name of the program is problematic particularly due to confusion with the 'Community Service Orders' within the corrective services system.

Recommendations

Although a number of significant issues have been raised throughout the course of the evaluation, they have been distilled down into some core themes against

which specific recommendations for the future development of the program can be explored.

The recommendations which are outlined in the remainder of this section are explored in greater detail in the main body of the report.

Recommendation One

The Department of Education and Training should clearly articulate a statement of outcomes for the Community Service Program

It is clear from both the literature review and the experiences of the pilot schools that there are significant benefits in a program of this nature. It is critical to articulate them in terms of outcomes for the program and then monitor and evaluate the program against achievement of those outcomes.

Recommendation Two

Schools should be supported to manage risk without compromising the quality of the community service experience for students.

As raised many times throughout the report, risk management is a significant source of anxiety for many and is perceived as a barrier to implementation

Recommendation Three

Appropriate support should be made available to all participating schools.

Much of the feedback from the pilot schools indicates that networking and professional development opportunities were key components of their ability to effectively process their experiences, reflect on their practice and identify new strategies and avenues for implementation in moving forward. A total support package should be made available to all schools and should take into account the use of technology as part of the mechanism for delivery.

Recommendation Four

Ensure that the program is appropriately resourced.

There must be an on-going commitment to providing some level of resource allocation to all schools participating in the Community Service Program. However, as the question of resources will continue to be a challenging one, it must be continually revisited throughout the implementation phase of the program.

Recommendation Five

Evaluation of the program should continue at least throughout the first year of implementation.

As the program moves into full implementation there are a number of issues which will still require exploration. The notion of further evaluation becomes especially critical in relation to the following issues: outcomes for students; resource allocation; and community impact.