Private School, Public Purpose

Social Responsibilities of Independent Schools

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INTRODUCTION

Independent schools

- Tax-exempt 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization
- Private, but not all private schools are independent
  - Governed by independent board of trustees
  - Funded primarily by tuition & charitable contributions ($16,000 average/year)
- Determines its curriculum, educational philosophy, and pedagogical practices without external interference
- Accreditation stricter with the National Association of Independent Schools
(PUBLIC) PURPOSE

Independent schools’ public purpose programs serve:

- Students → future leaders committed to a life of service
  - Only 1.5% of students nationwide
- Community → external organizations and youth & teacher education hubs

This study explores the idea of “private school, public purpose” and asks, as a wealth of resources, what responsibilities do independent schools have to their communities?
“Independent schools are uniquely positioned to make a difference in the public domain. Given the societal turf independent schools occupy, the considerable resources they command, and the powerful network of caring and influential people they attract, independent schools have the opportunity—and, I believe, the obligation—to do more than educate 1.5 percent of our nation’s children exceptionally well.”

- Al Adams (2000)
RESEARCH QUESTIONS

RQ1: What are the characteristics of successful public purpose programs in independent schools?

RQ2: What is the role / relationship of religious philosophies and Round Square membership in service programs?

RQ3: How could The Athenian School and other independent schools deliver on their mission to graduate students who integrate “service as a way of life”?
METHODS - APPROACHES

- NAIS 2013 Study on Public Purpose
- Comparative Analysis: Public Communications
  - Round Square schools
  - Website & Facebook posts 2019-2022
- The Athenian School Focus Group
  - Jamboard content analysis
- Expert Interviews
  - Al Adams
STUDENTS


Source: Loyola University New Orleans, Office of Academic Affairs (2022)
FINDINGS

Community Service
- Food Bank volunteer shift
- Beach Clean Up
- Writing Valentine’s Day cards to seniors
- 5k fundraiser

Service-Learning
- Environmental Science class doing ecological restoration on Mt Diablo
- Architecture class builds tiny house & donates to NPO

Community Engagement
- High school acapella group goes to public elementary school each week to run a choir class where public arts funding has been cut.
FINDINGS

Community Service

Service-Learning

Community Engagement
STUDENTS & COMMUNITY → Community Engagement

01 Understanding systems
02 Authentic relationships
03 Redistribution of power
04 Creating equitable classrooms
05 Social change skills

Critical Service Learning
FINDINGS

2013 NAIS Public Purpose in Independent Schools Report
- Some type of public purpose program exists at 98% of schools surveyed (n=402)
  - 95% = green programs: recycling, gardening, waste reduction, etc.
  - 93% = social service volunteering: senior centers, food banks, etc.
- 75% facilitate service-learning programs
  - 72% = partnerships / collaborations with NPOs
- Less than half have relationships with local public schools
  - Only 20% collaborate on enrichment programs, such as art, music, APs, etc.
FINDINGS

Comparative analysis (n=10) = website & Facebook posts (2019 - 2022)
- There is no evidence of Round Square (n=8) & religious institutions (n=5) having increased or more impactful public purpose programming mentioned to the public
- Service programming resource input ≠ mission delivery & values on service

The Athenian School Focus Group (n=228)
- Faculty and parents want deeper service experiences for students
- Service activities are idiosyncratic, often dependent on individual faculty and dissolve when people leave
- Faculty want double the partnerships with external organizations
- Parents overwhelmingly don’t know what’s happening
COMMUNICATION GAP

sell olive oil
IMPLICATIONS

● Assessment and measurements of impact for service programming are not well documented internally or from school to school

● Only insiders know what’s happening with public purpose programming at schools
  ○ Families, perspective students, & community organizations knowing is a marketing tool that is untapped in these schools

● Community engagement via critical service-learning is becoming best practice for service programming
RECOMMENDATIONS

Build capacity for community engagement.
Schools who value public purpose need to invest in people to steward relationships with organizations and regularly coach teachers on integrating service-learning into their curriculum.

Extend the reach.
Share resources. Summer programs & after-school programs for all students, community nights, inclusive teacher learning institutes or exchanges, etc. Community engagement is bringing people on campus and working together off-campus.

Yell it from the rooftops.
Photos, blogs, videos, and links to resources on the website. Families, students, nonprofit partners, and the community at large should know what’s happening and the full context in which it’s happening!
REFERENCES


[https://aladamsdotorg.files.wordpress.com/2016/02/four-roads-article.pdf](https://aladamsdotorg.files.wordpress.com/2016/02/four-roads-article.pdf)


REFERENCES (continued)

   https://www.nais.org
Private School, Public Purpose: Social Responsibilities of Independent Schools
Whitney Hofacker, MNA - Master of Nonprofit Administration - Capstone Project

SUMMARY
Independent schools’ can and should serve the communities around them. Public purpose programs mainly serve:
- Students as future leaders committed to a life of service, although only 1.5% of students nationwide
- Community via relationships with external organizations and youth & teacher education hubs

PURPOSE
This study explores the idea of “private school, public purpose” and asks, as a wealth of resources, what responsibilities to independent schools have to do their communities?

RESEARCH
RQ1: What are the characteristics of successful public purpose programs in independent schools?
RQ2: What is the role / relationship of religious philosophies and Round Square membership in service programs?
RQ3: How could The Athenian School and other independent schools deliver on their mission to graduate students who integrate “service as a way of life”?

METHODS
- The Athenian School Focus Group
  ○ Jamboard content analysis
- Comparative Analysis: Public Communications
  ○ Round Square schools
  ○ Website & Facebook posts 2019-2022
- Expert Interviews

DATA AND ANALYSIS
2013 NAIS Public Purpose in Independent Schools Report
- Some type of public purpose program exists at 98% of schools surveyed (n=402)
- 95% = green programs: recycling, gardening, waste reduction, etc. 93% = social service volunteering: senior centers, food banks, etc.
- 75% facilitate service-learning programs
  ○ 72% = partnerships / collaborations with NPOs
- Less than half have relationships with local public schools
- Only 20% collaborate on enrichment programs, such as art, music, APs, etc.

Comparative analysis = public website & Facebook posts (2019 - 2022)
- There is no evidence of Round Square & religious institutions having increased or more impactful public purpose programming
- Service programming resource input ≠ mission delivery & values on service

RESULTS
- Goal = Justice-oriented outcomes for students
- Assessment and measurements of impact for service programming are not well documented internally or from school to school
- Only insiders know what’s happening with public purpose programming at schools. Families, perspective students, & community organizations knowing is a marketing tool
- Community engagement via critical service-learning is becoming best practice for service programming

RECOMMENDATIONS
1. Expand Capacity
2. Extend Reach
3. Communicate!

REFERENCES