



UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

CHANGE THE WORLD FROM HERE

Private School, Public Purpose
Social Responsibility of Independent Schools

by

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To educators and the possibility of inclusive and just communities.

Abstract

Independent schools can be exclusive for students and families who have access, and they hold a wealth of resources. This study reviews the notion of “private school with a public purpose”, a common phrase for private schools cauterizing their missions to impact the communities around them in a positive and sustained way. The analysis emerges from an inside-out approach looking at data collected at The Athenian School, a previous study of over 400 independent schools, and how public purpose programming is externally communicated in several Round Square schools around the world. The study shows different views between secular and religious private schools’ and what a deeper and holistic model of public purpose programming could look like.

Keywords: public purpose, independent schools, service-learning, social responsibility

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Section 1. Introduction

“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” (Adams, A, 2000).

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

Defining Independent Schools

Independent schools are not part of the US public education system in that they do not receive state funding. All independent schools are private, but not all private schools are independent. An independent school operates as a tax-exempt 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, receives primary funding from tuition and charitable contributions, and determines its curriculum, educational philosophy, and pedagogical practices according to its mission and without external requirements or interference.

The most important difference between an independent school and a private school is that independent schools are governed by an independent board of trustees, versus being governed by a religious institution, for profit corporation, or another nonprofit corporation. And for most independent schools, accreditation standards intentionally allow for significant latitude. At their best, independent schools develop a cohesive, mission-driven culture that attracts families and educators who are drawn to this specific type of school. Independent schools educate only 1.5% of students nationwide.

At their best, independent schools can serve both students and their communities well, with social responsibility teachings, operate as lab schools to experiment with innovative education, and both invite the community into the school and work with external organizations. And at their worst, they can be bastions of privilege who might view service as simply philanthropy, cauterizing systemic privilege and power.

Nomenclature of Public Purpose Programs

In the research, I observed various trends and different perspectives on nomenclature of public purpose programs. From *private school*, *public purpose* and *civic engagement* to *community service* and *community engagement*, there are subtle power differences in each term.

Schools like Lick-Wilmerding High School in San Francisco, California, primarily use the phrase *private school*, *public purpose*. This makes sense for them because the former head of school at Lick-Wilmerding for 28 years, Al Adams, is credited with coining that very phrase in 1988. There is now an organization called The Partnership of Schools with Public Purpose that hosts an annual conference, new position titles popping up, and articles with the same terminology.

Mark Friedman, Director of Community Service at The Athenian School, says this about the phrase: “*Private school*, *public purpose* feels like a trademark. Some other schools had already branded themselves with this and it feels inauthentic to force Athenian to use it. It’s a phrase that is someone else’s language” (M. Friedman, Expert Interview 1, April 24, 2022).

Even Al Adams' thoughts on the phrase had evolved since he first published it in Lick-Wilmerding’s 1988 strategic plan. “*Public purpose* can be interpreted as unilateral, similar to words like *service* or *impact*, it’s someone doing something for or to someone else, not with them,” he says. While *public purpose* verbiage is still everywhere on Lick-Wilmerding High School’s website, Adams supports the school’s new Center for Civic Engagement, saying that “civic engagement speaks to the relationship being mutually beneficial and nomenclature is everything” (A. Adams, Expert Interview 2, April 18, 2022).

The term *civic engagement* is very popular and hints at the social responsibility outcomes desired for students at independent schools that center democratic values. Adams says that Lick-Wilmerding moved toward the term after repeated branding challenges with the interpretations of community service. Adams says, “A parent asked me if their kid’s volunteer hours at the mayor’s office counts as community service,” and he was taken aback that *community service* seemed to make families think about social service nonprofit organizations, versus simply service in or with the community.

That is just one challenge with using *community service* as a school’s chosen nomenclature. This terminology has inherent power dynamics and without contextual education, can perpetuate the dynamics of the haves and the have-nots. To move away from service, many educational institutions have adopted *service-learning*, as both terminology and pedagogy. Service-learning is a teaching and learning approach that integrates community service with academic studies to deepen and contextualize learning, with the end goals to instill civic responsibility in students and strengthen communities.

A model that The Athenian School is currently trying to implement leans on community engagement. Table 1 illustrates examples of how a school might move from community engagement, to service-learning, and finally to community engagement.

Table 1: Community Engagement Spectrum

Community Service	Service-Learning	Community Engagement
Individual students or groups volunteer	Students responsible for the work	School leadership places community engagement at center of educational program
Faculty act as advisor	Faculty members design curriculum and organize projects relevant to the coursework	Faculty work with students to design, access, and redesign effective programs
Accountability measured through hours tracked or money raised	Students & teachers assess outcomes. Community	Community organizations and school(s) are mutually involved in assessing

	organization provides direct feedback	outcomes and continuing improvement of program
<p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food Bank volunteer shift • Beach Clean Up • Writing Valentine’s Day cards to seniors • 5k fundraiser 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environmental Science class doing ecological restoration on Mt Diablo • Architecture class builds tiny house & donates to NPO 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High school acapella group goes to public elementary school each week to run a choir class where public arts funding has been cut.

Ultimately, the chosen nomenclature for a school’s public purpose depends on and is reflective of its program outcomes. Are its public purpose programs primarily serving students, so that they are future leaders committed to a life of service and responsibility to self, planet, and others? Are its public purpose programs primarily serving the community, working with external organizations and inviting others on campus to share resources and education, or act as teacher training hubs? Or, can they and should they serve both functions?

Research Questions

To reiterate the purpose of this research and outline the report, 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?

- 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”?

Section 2: Literature Review

In exploring the various ways that independent schools and their students contribute to their communities, two main themes emerged: student outcomes and community outcomes. The landscape of equity in independent schools reveals many tensions; is the goal to graduate students who become generous, civic, and responsible citizens, or is the goal to authentically share resources and uplift the surrounding communities? I argue that the former is a student-centered approach, which has the capacity to either reinforce class barriers or break them down, and the latter is a more justice-oriented, community-centric approach.

I make the argument that both outcomes can exist, although rarely in equal proportions. Friedman believes that public purpose programs “must be useful for the people and be a positive learning experience for the students. ‘Partnerships’ work for both people. No one or no institution is selfless” (M. Friedman, Expert Interview 1, April 24, 2022).

I believe that independent schools have a greater responsibility to affect positive, authentic change within their neighboring communities. There are successful service-learning programs in independent secondary schools that are formative in inspiring youth to serve their communities and do good in the world. The program inputs of these schools, like staffing, schedule and time commitment, and justice-oriented curriculum, are thoughtful and intentional and create win-win outcomes for students and their surrounding communities.

NAIS Study on Public Purpose

In 2013, The National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS) did a comprehensive survey of independent school administrators (n=402) to learn about the various public purpose programs in place, the factors supporting these programs, and the challenges schools face in implementing them. The survey also included questions to assess the extent to which these programs were reflected in the missions and strategic plans of schools, as well as, student participation and the benefits of public purpose programming to the school. An advantage of this study is that the survey participants are insiders and answering questions based on their internal knowledge of

public purpose programming at their schools. The same information cannot be found in public interfaces from these schools, including their websites and social media, which is illustrated in the data in Section 3.

The NAIS study finds that some type of public purpose program exists in virtually all independent schools. The two programs most commonly mentioned included green projects, such as recycling, waste reduction, composting, green roof, gardening, ecological restoration, etc. (95% of schools); and, social service work with organizations like retirement centers, food banks, and other social service programs (93%). Three-quarters of schools engage in service-learning while another 72% of schools participate in partnerships with non-profit organizations. In contrast, less than half of schools include professional development or training for other teachers (45%) in their public purpose programs. Even smaller proportions of schools collaborate with other schools to teach enrichment programs, such as music, art, AP classes, etc., (20%); conduct remedial classes for students at other schools (17%), and/or offer teaching or learning centers for students from other schools (11%) (NAIS, 2013).

The majority of independent schools, 56% require community service hours, however less so in New England schools (only 36%), which are more likely to have accumulated wealth in more traditional and conservative educational institutions.

Outcomes. Participants cited a variety of ways through which their schools have benefited by having public purpose programming. Among them the top five benefits include:

1. Preparing socially responsible leaders (90%)
2. Expanding the school's impact in the community (86%)
3. Increasing school awareness (86%)
4. Understanding the challenges and opportunities faced by school communities (85%)
5. Developing leaders who demonstrate service ethics (83%).

Few participants indicated other benefits experienced from public purpose programs (5%), some of which include: helping students and faculty learn more about themselves; providing students with a real world experience and a broader perspective on the world; improving safety and

quality of life in the communities benefiting from the programs; fostering community within the school; helping local organizations in need; working towards equity and justice; improving the educational experiences of students in other schools, public and private; creating habits of heart that match their education; giving students a sense of self-worth and confidence; and improving teacher retention and hiring by giving them a broader sense of purpose and impact. (NAIS, 2013)

The first and last top five benefits speak to developing socially-responsible citizens who take their service ethic into life beyond school, while the middle three - expanding the school's impact in the community, increasing school awareness, and understanding the challenges and opportunities faced by school communities - speak to both social responsibility and have the potential to dive deeper into justice-oriented outcomes.

Student's Citizenship Development

Some educators justify their work with privileged students in a privileged educational institution by instilling an ethos of service and social responsibility into the next generation of well-educated leaders. The hope is that independent schools teach students to be good people, care about others, and give back to their communities so that the inequities will be less and less moving forward.

Kahne & Westheimer (2014) argue that all schools, public and private, are tasked with shaping citizenship in students. Drawing on democratic theory and on findings from their study, the authors detail three conceptions of the "good" citizen - personally responsible, participatory, and justice oriented.

In Table 2, Kahne & Westheimer identify the attributes, actions, and foundational assumptions of each type of citizen. They argue that there is a progression with personally responsible citizenship being the baseline and students engage deeper to become participatory citizens, and lastly, striving for the pinnacle of justice-oriented citizens. I developed Figure 1 to further illustrate that progression.

Table 2: Kinds of Citizens (J. Kahne & J. Westheimer, 2014)

	Personally responsible citizen	Participatory citizen	Justice-oriented citizen
Description	Acts responsibly in his/her community Works and pays taxes Obeys laws Recycles, gives blood Volunteers to lend a hand in times of crisis	Active member of community organizations and/or improvement efforts Organizes community efforts to care for those in need, promote economic development, or clean up environment Knows how government agencies work Knows strategies for accomplishing collective tasks	Critically assesses social, political, and economic structures to see beyond surface causes Seeks out and address areas of injustice Knows about democratic social movements and how to effect system change
Sample action	Contributes food to a food drive	Helps to organize a food drive	Explores why people are hungry and acts to solve root causes
Core assumptions	To solve social problems and improve society, citizens must have good character; they must be honest, responsible and law-abiding members of the community	To solve social problems and improve society, citizens must actively participate and take leadership positions within established systems and community structures	To solve social problems and improve society, citizens must question, debate, and change established systems and structures that reproduce patterns of injustice over time.

Figure 1: Levels of Citizenship



Kahne & Westheimer (2004)

Whether consciously or unconsciously, some schools stay in the personally-responsible citizenship tier and teach service primarily as philanthropy. This is seen in schools who outline their public purpose programming as hosting food drives, bake sales, fundraisers, and donating to a chosen charity. I argue that this can perpetuate and double down on economic inequality and the outdated notions of charity.

A public purpose program that is solely based on volunteerism can similarly be problematic in perpetuating economic equality - think bandaids vs stopping the bleeding. However, volunteering where people have immediate needs that need to be met can be very rewarding for students. “One might think that the goal of community service is to help others; however, when students get involved to make a difference, they receive as much as they give,” reads The Athenian School’s community service literature (Athenian, 2022). Athenian goes on to say:

One of the beauties of community engagement lies in the way that it allows for people of different ages and backgrounds to come together.

You make new friends and develop your social skills. Research documents that volunteering makes you happy, combats depression, and provides you with a sense of purpose. When you work with a community organization, you develop skills and gain experience that can be helpful in future jobs. And community engagement can bring fun and fulfillment to your life (Athenian, 2022).

While this literature is oriented to students and informs them what's in it for them, it misses the opportunity to be community-centric and broaden the students' horizons, which I argue is really a disservice to students.

This is where service-learning can blend with academic studies to help students identify historical and social context while serving with a community, and thus, support justice-oriented citizenship and systemic change.

Evolution of Service-Learning

Pritchard & Whitehead (2004) identify four fundamentals of service-learning:

- Students provide service to meet authentic needs.
- Service links through deliberate planning to the subject matter students are studying and the skills and knowledge they are developing in school.
- Students reflect on the service they provide.
- Service-learning is coordinated in collaboration with the community.

They expand to say what school-based service-learning is not...

- a volunteer or community service program with no ties to academics.
- an add-on to the existing curriculum.
- logging a certain number of service hours in order to graduate.
- one-sided—benefiting either the students or the community.
- compensatory service assigned as a form of punishment by the courts or school administrators
- only for high school and college students.

There is a bounty of research outlining successful service-learning programs and studies proving its efficacy.

Figure 2: Service-Learning Model



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

Critical service-learning is a growing ideology distinguished from traditional service-learning. Scholars like Kahne criticize that traditional service learning may entrench social inequity by prioritizing students over communities and ignoring the political nature of service. Meanwhile, critical service-learning endeavors to explicitly integrate social justice concepts in the classroom; redistribute power among students, professors, and community partners; and develop authentic relationships (Stith, Emmerling, Malone. 2018).

Duke University's *Critical Service-Learning Conversations Tool* (2018) is a self-assessment rubric for teachers to measure their service-learning curriculum's efficacy in that students leave with the following outcomes:

1. Understanding systemic inequalities: contextualizing service-learning with historical grounding and of understanding social systems

2. Build and maintain authentic relationships: students holistic understanding of the community, commitment to partner, and maintenance of relationships
3. Practice and prioritize the redistribution of power: contextualizing power dynamics, reorienting “need”, recognizing community strengths, and sharing the classroom
4. Create equitable classrooms: nontraditional knowledge sources, engaging diversity and identity (culturally-responsive teaching)
5. Develop social change skills: teaching social change skills, assessing impact, and capacity building for change (Stith, Emmerling, Malone. 2018)

Independent Schools as Labs for Innovation

Both Adams (2020) and Guilla (2021) identify the history and the continued possibility of independent schools as being “labs”; testing and then sharing innovative education to public schools to uplift all students. This could take the form of regional teaching institutes or training centers that invite all educators to present and learn from one another.

In the broad trajectory of the development of public school education in the United States, independent schools have often played an outsized historical role in the development of innovative practices and programs, everything from the Advanced Placement program (started with four independent schools and three universities in the 1950s) to the current Mastery Transcript. Adams believes independent schools are particularly well-positioned to develop, adopt, and share approaches to current educational challenges and changes that can broadly benefit all students—public, private, and independent. (Adams, A. 2020). Similarly, Gulla argues:

It is this spirit of innovation, of a willingness for individual independent schools to try something new—something like altered daily schedules, the infusion into our teaching of what neuroscience has taught us over the last half century about how we best learn, more student-driven curriculum that augments interest and motivation—that makes us critical right now. These experiments don’t always succeed, and the built-in accountability of an absence of demand can be a ruthless determinant of this. But when they

do, they begin to spread, as nodes in a geographic area, among coalitions of the like-minded and, with the fundamental tenet that there is no one right answer because children don't sum to an average but are infinitely complex individuals, and new approaches to the challenges of education can emerge (Gulla, J. 2021)

Given recent world events, including the struggles amid the global pandemic, to the resurgence of the racial injustice movement and politically divisive events challenging democracy, the urgent need for justice-oriented citizenship, critical service-learning, and authentic community engagement is critical for the next generation.

Section 3: Methods and Approaches

The data collection for this project focuses on a specific independent school's adult community's experience of community service at The Athenian School through a content analysis of focus group data. Additionally, I gathered information from several other independent schools' public-facing communications on service and conducted a comparative analysis. Lastly, I interviewed three experts in the field at the intersections of education and community service to explore the topic even further.

As an administrator and through my role on a Community Engagement Task Force at The Athenian School, I have access to previously collected research from my institution. As a Task Force, we conducted focus groups seeking to learn about the strengths, opportunities, and barriers to Athenian's community service programming. The Head of School has given permission for me to use and analyze this data for my capstone research, and no individual's names are used.

Sampling Selection

For the content analysis, The Athenian School selected three internal stakeholders: Athenian parents, Middle School faculty, and Upper School faculty. In an ideal world, I would want to analyze the experiences of students, as their voices are essential to measure the impact of Athenian's public purpose programming. However, this study is not about impact, rather, perceptions and communications. Additionally, there would be some legal and broader permission hoops to jump through to survey minors for this capstone project.

For the comparative analysis, I selected schools that were both similar to and different from The Athenian School. All 10 schools reviewed are independent schools that are members of Round Square (n=7), or accredited by the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS) (n=8), or both. Round Square is an international consortium of over 220 schools who unite on their missions and values around the Round Square IDEALS: internationalism, democracy, environmental stewardship, adventure, leadership, and service. I was curious if the Round Square

member schools' commitment to service would have a noticeable effect on their service programming. Other criteria for selection included:

- Geographical diversity: US West (n=3), US East (n=3), US South (n=2), and outside the US (n=2)
- Religious affiliation: religious (n=5), not religious (n=5)
- Boarding / Day status: boarding only (n=2), day only (n=2), boarding & day (n=7)
- All schools have an upper school or high school (grades 9-12)

Data Collection

For the internal stakeholders at Athenian, we chose a focus group format during a routine Middle School faculty meeting in January 2021 (n=104), an Upper School faculty meeting in March 2021 (n=75), and an Athenian Parent Association meeting in December 2020 (n=49). The Community Engagement Task Force includes five Athenian administrators, so we divided faculty and parents into smaller groups of five or six people to encourage greater participation. The meetings were conducted virtually and we used Google Jamboard for participants to post “sticky notes” onto their individual focus group’s Jamboard. Participants were given three prompts; yellow sticky notes represent what Athenian is already doing, green sticky notes represent what Athenian could do to deepen community service, and red sticky notes represent barriers to this work.

For the comparative analysis, I chose to deep dive into the selected 10 schools’ websites and primary Facebook account to learn what role service plays at the school and if applicable, how they communicate their service programs to the public. I created a Qualtrics survey for myself to collect specific data as I sifted through the various curriculum, programs, and social media channels presented on the website.

Data Coding

In the focus group content analysis, I coded the data by stakeholder (parent, Middle school faculty, or Upper School faculty); color of sticky note (green, yellow, red); location of service activity (on-campus, within 10 miles of campus, 10+ miles of campus, or international); primary

recipient of the service activity; type of activity; if it requires an external partnership with an individual or an organization; who the Athenian coordinator or point of contact is (individual faculty, a department, or the community service director); primary engagement outcome (student-centered responsible citizens or community-centered justice-oriented); the general themes of barriers (school's rural location, schedule / calendar, organizational capacity, or lack of curricular embeddedness / idiosyncratic).

In the comparative analysis, I looked at each school's mission statement and values and pulled out phrases that mention "service" or any of the common language used for the outcomes of service like "compassion", "enhance possibilities for others", "social justice", "goodness and selflessness", etc. I surveyed schools' choices on nomenclature for their service programming; *community service*, *civic engagement*, or *public purpose*. Other data collected and coded includes: required service hours, scaffolding of service programming by grade, program outcomes, number of staff and their titles supporting the program, program presence and location on website, if and how the student experience is highlighted (website, annual report, blog, social media, podcast, etc.), and the number of Facebook posts from 2019 - present with media evidence of service activities. I chose this three-year range to capture service activities before, during, and in the current state of COVID-19.

Interviews

My position at The Athenian School made for a smooth experience in speaking with three experts at the intersections of education, social justice and service-learning:

- Al Adams, Independent Educational Consultant and Former Head of School at Lick-Wilmerding High School. Al is best known in the education arena for his articles, presentations, workshops and advising on educational leadership, strategic thinking, institutional positioning, diversity/access/ inclusion and public:private partnerships. During Al's tenure, Lick-Wilmerding became recognized as a national independent school leader in the realms of (1) access, inclusion and student success, (2) its head,

heart, hands curriculum, (3) modeling what it is to be a private school with public purpose, a phrase he coined in 1988.

- Mark Friedman, Director of Community Service and Round Square at The Athenian School. Originally from Saint Louis, Missouri, where he attended an all-boys Jesuit high school, Mark has been working at Athenian for 20 years. With a background in youth leadership development and nonprofit management, he holds a Masters in Nonprofit Administration from the University of San Francisco. Mark loves working with our wonderful students and creating powerful learning experiences in communities near and far.
- William Kim, Executive Director at Summit Denali Middle School. William Y. Kim is a first-generation Korean-American born and raised in California. Education is a second career for Will, and he was drawn to schools because of the direct impact he could make on systemic inequities in this country. Will strongly identifies as a lifelong learner and loves to challenge students to explore the world around them and to create a better future for their communities. He loves working at Summit because he shares their commitment to creating empowering, inclusive school communities that prepare students to be contributing members of society.

Section 4. Data Analysis

Focus Group Content Analysis

There were a total of 228 responses from participants who evaluated The Athenian School’s community service programs. In the sample, there are 49 responses from parents (21.5%), 104 responses from middle school faculty (45.6%), and 75 responses from upper school faculty (32.9%). Of the 228 responses, participants spoke to 75 service activities that are already happening on campus (32.9%), 121 service activities that we could or should be doing to deepen the service experience (53.1%), and 32 responses spoke to the barriers to meaningful service (14.0%).

Stakeholders, Depth of Service, and Locations of Service

Of the 147 responses that identified the locations of where service activities happen or where they should / could happen, 72 occur on Athenian’s campus (49.0%), 10 occur within 10 miles of campus (49.0%), 37 occur 10 miles or more from campus, 4 occur internationally, and 15 occur remotely or online. Note that The Athenian School is located in the wealthy, predominantly white neighborhood of Danville, and that service locations that are 10 or more miles from Athenian include San Francisco, Oakland, and Concord where there are higher concentrations of marginalized people.

To determine whether there was a relationship between the stakeholder of parent, middle school faculty, or upper school faculty and the location of service, a chi-square test was conducted. The null hypothesis is that there is no relationship between the stakeholder and the location of service. The chi square test results were statistically significant ($\chi^2=29.4$, $df=8$, $p=0.04$), validating the alternate hypothesis that there is a relationship between the stakeholder - in this case, the upper school faculty - and the location of service - Athenian’s campus.

Table 3: Observed or Desired Location of Service by Stakeholder

	Stakeholder			
Location of Service	Parents	Middle school	Upper school	Total
Remote / Online	5	8	2	15
Athenian Campus	3	46	23	72
Within 10 miles	3	15	1	19
Over 10 miles	5	13	19	37
International	0	4	0	4

Total	16	86	45	147
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To determine whether there was a relationship between the stakeholder of parent, middle school faculty, or upper school faculty and the student outcome of service, a chi-square test was conducted. The null hypothesis is that there is no relationship between the stakeholder and the observed or desired student outcome. The chi square test results were statistically significant ($\chi^2=14.5$, $df=2$, $p=0.01$), validating the alternate hypothesis that there is a relationship between the stakeholder and the student outcomes. Table 4 also illustrates the importance of scaffolding citizenship outcomes (responsible to participatory to justice-oriented) with emotional development, meaning that upper school students are better poised for deeper engagement.

Table 4: Observed and Desired Student Outcomes by Stakeholder

Stakeholder	Observed and Desired Student Outcomes		Total
	Responsible & Participatory	Justice-Oriented	
Parents	46	2	48
Middle school	102	1	103
Upper school	57	10	67
Total	205	13	218

The data in Table 5 demonstrates that leaving Athenian’s campus in Danville and traveling 10+ miles away to cities like Oakland, San Francisco, and Concord provides more opportunities for justice-oriented service.

Table 5: Observed and Desired Student Outcomes by Location of Service

Location of Service	Responsible & Participatory	Justice-Oriented	Total
Remote / Online	14	0	14
Athenian Campus	70	2	72
Within 10 miles	19	0	19
Over 10 miles	31	4	35
International	4	0	4
Total	138	6	144

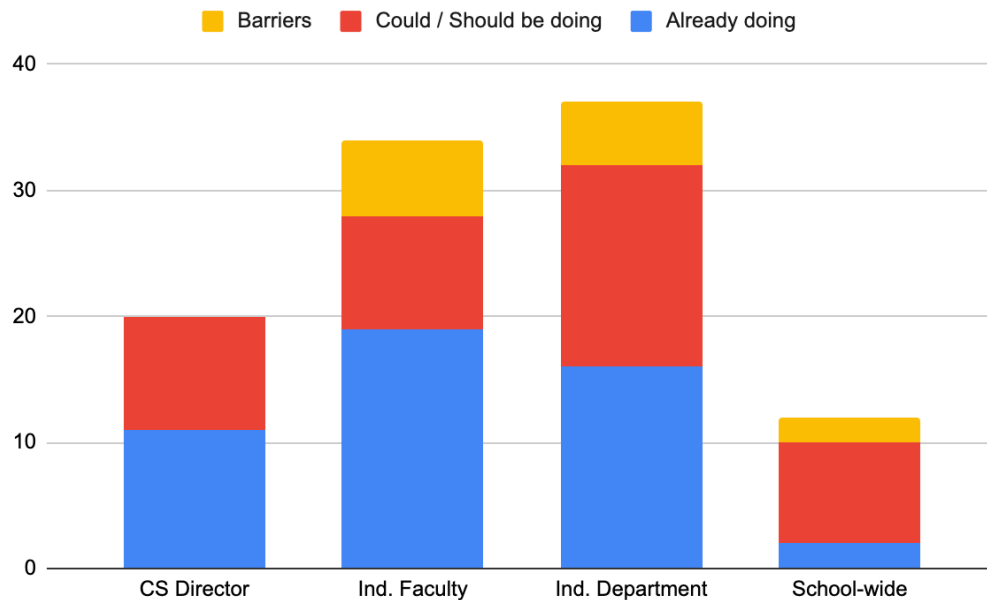
Staffing Does Not Support Authentic Relationships with Community Partners

Faculty desire double the partnerships with external organizations and faculty articulated that service activities are idiosyncratic and often dependent on individual faculty, so that relationships dissolve when people leave Athenian.

Table 6: Human Resource Allocations and External Community Partnership Needs

Coordinator	External Partnership Required		Total
	No	Yes	
Community Service Director	0	11	11
Ind. Dept / Div	14	9	23
Ind. Faculty	5	17	22
Whole School	3	2	5
Total	22	39	61

Figure 3: Human Resource Allocations by Current & Future Service



Communications Comparative Analysis

While surveying each school's website and Facebook page, I observed that more traditional schools, like those in New England, had more philanthropic public purpose programming like fundraisers, bake sales, 5k runs, etc. and less justice-oriented outcomes like partnerships with marginalized communities. This author sees this as evidence of perpetuating socio-economic divisions.

There is no evidence of Round Square (n=8) & religious institutions (n=5) having increased or more impactful public purpose programming. There is a relationship between public purpose programming resource inputs like staffing and funding and mission delivery & values on service.

Interviews Analysis

Al Adams

When Al Adams first arrived at Lick-Wilmerding, he made an entry plan that is now the gold standard. He interviewed every community member - students, faculty, staff, and trustees. He synthesized this data and reflected it back to all school employees during a staff retreat. Two primary models came from those listening sessions and thus the head, heart and hands curriculum & private school, public purpose was born.

Adams found critical support from a trustee-level committee, who created filters to evaluate their engagement & development with programs. This became their north star. There were early adopters in the faculty that only grew with time. Faculty had perceptions of how various schools and different kinds of kids were doing academically and emotionally, assuming that students at Lick-Wilmerding were thriving in this innovative and progressive independent school.

However, when Adams and the leadership team reflected data on how different demographics of students were doing, the results were depressing and eye-opening: students from less privileged backgrounds and marginalized groups were systematically not doing as well. Adams took this to the faculty and by the end of the meeting, everyone was in tears.

The general consensus after that study was, “We need to change the way that we teach because we’re not doing a good job serving everyone.” This was their start at culturally-responsive teaching and creating equitable classrooms, which is a tenet of critical service-learning.

William Kim

Will served as The Athenian School’s first and last Public Purpose Coordinator. He is now the Executive Director at a charter middle school and finds solace in getting out of private education and into more accessible education, while still having freedom to innovate and curricular latitude.

Kim emphasized the importance of common language and clear distinction about what “public purpose” means for a school like Athenian. From his experience, the school administration advocated for outcomes that primarily served students, not the community at large. Kim believes that a school must choose between two end goals and that there is no win-win:

1. Prioritize student learning where students walk away with authentic experiences
2. Or, the school operates as a “lab” and leverages their dollars to support district schools to achieve the results that their public school students need

The latter is an “education for all” approach. Kim cited Lick-Wilmerding’s Bay Area Teacher Institute, where private schools, public schools, and local universities partner to train educators together under one roof. Lick-Wilmerding dedicates a percentage of its budget toward community initiatives that uplift all students, not just their own.

Mark Friedman

Mark Friedman has been the Community Service Director at The Athenian School since the mid 1990s. Friedman believes that schools can and should serve students and their community; you can have both.

However, Friedman clearly states that if schools like Athenian want their public purpose programs to succeed, they must invest in staff and build capacity. There needs to be investment at all levels: the board of trustees, the head of school, and the individual program directors.

Friedman noted that the administration has vocalized an odd motivation for public purpose programming. “As a 501(c)(3), we should be earning our tax-exempt status by doing more for the general good who are tax payers. Friedman thinks the narrative should focus on shared humanity, and not the school earning its tax-exempt status.

He identifies a few areas for improvement to better tell Athenian’s public purpose story:

- Measure the impact of the programs: pre and post surveys, content analysis of student’s service reflection essays, and other best practices on impact assessment.
- Connect student’s service work to the school: It’s a requirement at Athenian to do 30+ hours of service each year and to complete an independent service project with one organization in their junior and senior years. Friedman says that students take so much ownership of their service projects that it no longer feels like an extension of the school. He’s unsure to what degree they associate this work with the school.
- More teachers need to be practicing service-learning pedagogy in class and connect service to their curriculum. He adds, “Then PR the hell out of the small cohort of teachers who are doing it well,” so that others are inspired.
- Civic engagement should be a strategy of the school: “Athenian and citizenship; it’s baked into the name,” he quips.

Lastly Friedman admitted that Athenian’s location is a huge challenge. Although it’s nestled on a beautiful 75 acres sharing an easement with a state park, the location doesn’t lend itself well to social justice education. “A social justice orientation requires some visible injustice,” and Concord is the nearest low-income neighborhood 30 minutes away.

Section 5: Implications and Recommendations

Findings

In the comparative analysis, my hypothesis was that Round Square Schools, whose membership requires them to have service as a tenet of their educational philosophies would have service loud and proud on their websites. I also hypothesized that religious schools would have more of a public commitment to service. And the finding is that they don't - I either had to dig deep into the website or nothing existed on the website about public purpose programming for both Round Square Schools and religious schools.

Secondly, recalling the NAIS study that 87% of schools have public purpose reflected in their mission, this finding shows that they are not putting the resources into telling that story to prospective students, families, or community organizations who might be considering working with them.

Looking at the findings within my own organization, The Athenian School, it's clear that both faculty and parents want deeper service experiences for students. Upper school faculty are ready for justice-oriented critical service-learning pedagogy. The data shows a need for developmentally-appropriate scaffolding: middle school focuses on responsible/ participatory citizens on Athenian's campus; upper school's focus is shifting toward justice-oriented outcomes, and those are 50% more likely to occur 10+ miles from campus (SF, Oakland, Concord).

The data supports the argument for increased investment in human resources to reach public purpose programming goals. Service activities are idiosyncratic, often dependent on individual faculty and relationships with external partners dissolve when individual faculty leave Athenian. On a similar note, faculty see the value of collaborating with external organizations and desire double the partnerships with external organizations. But without capacity building with dedicated staff, this is not possible. There must be a more organized and central keeper of relationships. Schools must put their money where their mission is. If "service as a way of life" is in your mission statement, like it is at Athenian, how are you designing backward to support

that outcome? A school of Athenian's size with 550 students should have at least a team of three people instead of one 50% FTE role.

Lastly, Athenian is not effectively telling the story of its public program initiatives. Parents overwhelmingly don't know what's happening in the community service program and have limited perceptions of how their children interact with the community. Public communications are critical in telling the story of what a school is doing and where they are going.

Implications

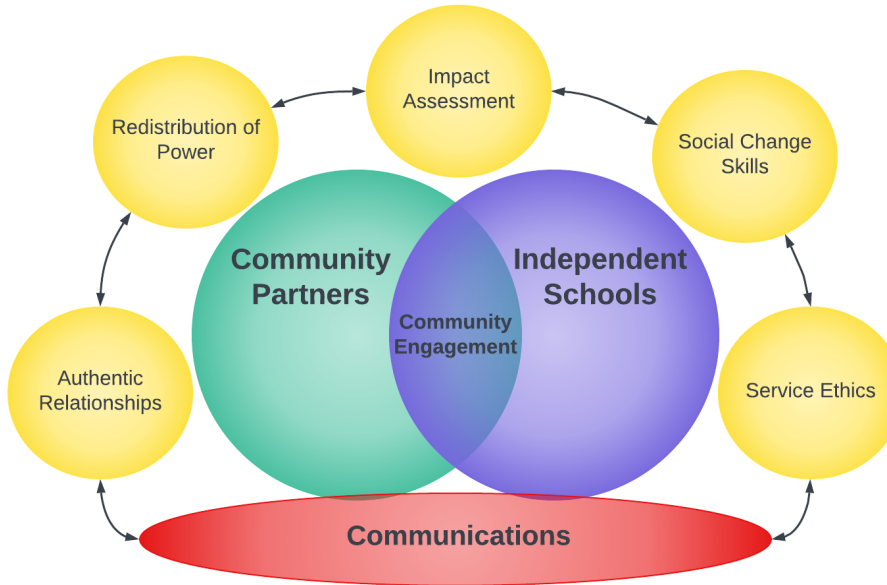
- Assessment and measurements of impact for service programming are not well documented internally or from school to school
- Only insiders know what's happening with public purpose programming at schools
 - Families, perspective students, & community organizations knowing is a marketing tool that is untapped in these schools
- Community engagement via critical service-learning is becoming best practice for service programming

Recommendations

1. 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.
2. 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.
3. 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!

Figure 4: Support and Outcomes of Effective Public Purpose Programing



Section 6: Conclusion

This capstone research project synthesizes the successes and gaps in public purpose, service-learning and citizenship development programs to answer what responsibilities independent schools have to their communities. This author believes that schools can serve both their students and their communities well, and offers a roadmap on how to get there.

Independent schools are in the unique position to instill and inspire social responsibility and social justice in the next generation of leaders, experiment with innovative education models, invite the community into the school to share its wealth of resources, and create authentic relationships with community organizations to empower people within and outside of the school to be agents of change.

There are numerous opportunities to expand this research: from public purpose program impact analysis to case studies and best practices from schools and community organizations that have leveraged authentic partnerships that serve all.

With adequate staffing to build capacity, manage relationships, and assess impact, collaboration with organizations on and off campus, and inspiring public narratives, independent schools like The Athenian School can lead (and follow!) in the creation and sustainability of healthy and justice-oriented ecosystems.

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Author's Bio

Whitney Hofacker is the Dean of Experiential Education at The Athenian School, a 6-12 independent school, in the San Francisco Bay Area. She collaborates with nonprofit organizations and her talented colleagues at Athenian on planning and delivering a variety of curricular outdoor education, service-learning, and environmental programs. The school is founded on the philosophical principles of Kurt Hanh, who founded notable institutions Round Square and Outward Bound, and Whitney's work aligns well with Athenian's founding pillars of inspiring the next generations to be global citizens, adventurers, environmental stewards, and leaders.

Prior to her current role, she was a Director of the Athenian Wilderness Experience, a 26-day backpacking trip in Death Valley and Yosemite National Parks. Whitney has also served as a Program Manager at GirlVentures, executing kayaking, backpacking, and rock climbing expeditions for female-identified youth, and a Program Director at the National Conference for Community and Justice, where she facilitated Anytown, a social justice leadership camp for teens, and piloted Police and Youth Together, an initiative to address police & community relationships in Dayton, Ohio.

She holds a Bachelor's of Arts degree in English Literature and Political Science, and a French minor, from Miami University in Ohio. Whitney earned her Masters of Nonprofit Administration in May 2022 from the University of San Francisco.