Citizen Schools Expanded Learning Time: Bringing Together Youth and Adults through Project-Based Learning

East Palo Alto and San Jose

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Year Founded: 1995
Organization type: nonprofit/ngo/citizen sector
Project Stage: Scaling
Budget: $1 million - $5 million
Website: http://www.citizenschools.org
Twitter: http://twitter.com/cschools
Facebook: http://www.facebook.com/CitizenSchools

Education reform
Youth development
Youth leadership

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Project Summary

Concise Summary: Help us pitch this solution! Provide an explanation within 3-4 short sentences.

Citizen School's innovative, hands-on Apprenticeship program helps develop empathy skills in middle schoolers as they work in teams and with adult mentors to solve complex problems. Students communicate ideas, exchange points of view, and collaborate to design, complete, and present their project.

WHAT IF - Inspiration: Write one sentence that describes a way that your project dares to ask, "WHAT IF?"

What if we could give disadvantaged young people extra learning time, extra mentoring, and extra chances to successfully engage in hands-on, real-world projects with caring adult mentors, while at the same time build understanding and empathy among those

About Project

Problem: What problem is this project trying to address?

To develop empathy, adolescents must have access to people with different backgrounds, viewpoints, and strengths in order to promote healthy cognitive, social-emotional, and identity development. In low-income communities, public schools do not have the resources to recruit and train caring professional volunteers, and children grow up with little or no opportunity to know and experience successful scientists, engineers, lawyers, or artists.

Solution: What is the proposed solution? Please be specific!

During their four 11-week apprenticeships each year, students explore new domains and develop skills under the tutelage of volunteer "Citizen Teachers", who teach 21st century skills and serve as role models. Citizen Teachers bring unique credibility as real-world experts, and are powerful examples to students of the practice of empathy - caring adults spending valuable time each week at their school listening to their opinions and ideas and helping them to learn and grow. We engage 1,000 students a year in real-world, project-based learning with adult mentors. Their success requires them to see the world from multiple perspectives, find positive ways to channel negative feelings such as envy or anger, and forge compromises as a team.
Example: Walk us through a specific example(s) of how this solution makes a difference; include its primary activities.

Citizen Teacher Dr. Larry Barone teaches a Design Thinking apprenticeship, in which through five phases — discovery, ideation, interpretation, experimentation and evolution — students use creativity, analytical skills, and teamwork to solve real-world problems. Dr. Barone teaches user-centered design, highlighting empathy in the design process. Students interact with members of their community to pinpoint an area where they can create change, and proceed to develop, build, test, and evaluate their solution. Dr. Barone has reported: “The kids transform themselves into master problem solvers...the whole experience is magical as our kids learn from failure, embrace the chaos of innovation, and start their transformation into design thinkers.”

Impact: What is the impact of the work to date? Also describe the projected future impact for the coming years.

Citizen Schools has an extensive and independently verified record of positive impact on youth participants:
- 6th and 7th grade students who consistently attended Citizen Schools outperformed a comparison group in 6 out of 7 indicators of school success, including grades, discipline issues, and standardized test scores - Former participants graduated from high school within four years at a rate of 71%, compared to 59% among matched peers - Participating in Citizen Schools’ program was associated with an additional five months of learning in ELA and three months of learning in math each year relative to what would be expected in the absence of the program - After participating in STEM apprenticeships, 80% of Citizen Schools students express interest in STEM careers, more than double the national rate for 8th graders, as students can imagine themselves as scientists and engineers.

Spread Strategies: Moving forward, what are the main strategies for scaling impact?

Citizen Schools has always had a dual focus on direct programmatic work and systemic change. We encourage replication of our Apprenticeship model to scale on a national level, particularly in STEM fields, by: our Catalyst initiative engaging 7,500 STEM Citizen Teachers over the next 3 years; leading US2020, an initiative challenging companies to dedicate 20% of their workforce to volunteer 20 hours teaching STEM lessons to students; a $3M Investing in Innovation grant from the U.S. DOE for STEM Apprenticeships; 4) working with AmeriCorps on STEMCorps, based on our Apprenticeships model.

Sustainability

Financial Sustainability Plan: What is this solution’s plan to ensure financial sustainability?

Citizen Schools receives financial support from a diverse array of sources including foundations, individuals, corporations, and the public sector. We have a track record of securing private sector funding for major initiatives, including a $31 million campaign to support its 2007-12 growth plan and an $18 million campaign to support its 2011-14 business plan. We maintain a 4-month reserve fund and a $3M line of credit from Bank of America.

Marketplace: Who else is addressing the problem outlined here? How does the proposed project differ from these approaches?

Boys & Girls Club provides after-school programming including crafts and recreation. Spark provides one-on-one mentors for youth. BELL offers small-group tutoring to low-income students. Other programs offer self-esteem programming and a safe place for students after school. We combine the most powerful aspects of these programs to provide a relationship-focused, intensive academic and skill-building program. Students are mentored by experts who help them build their academic and 21st century skills while exposing them to college and career opportunities through Apprenticeships.

Team

Founding Story

Citizen Schools was founded in 1995 by Eric Schwarz and Ned Rimer. Eric, a newspaper reporter at the time, taught Citizen Schools’ first apprenticeship at a Boston school located in one of the poorest neighborhoods in the city, working with small groups of fifth graders to design, publish, and distribute a community newspaper. Eric was impressed by how eager the students were to create something of their own and how they cooperated as a team to make it happen, and how this exciting project showed them the connection between their school literacy lessons and a career in publishing. And he realized that these kids had never had anyone volunteer to come to their school to share their passion and expertise with them - the “opportunity gap.”

Team

Program staff: Campus Directors (full-time) – Manage the extended day programs in our partner schools; 4-year college degree, 2+ years experience teaching in high-needs public schools. Teaching Fellows (full-time) - Provide academic support and facilitate apprenticeships led by volunteers. Team Leaders (part-time) - Academic coaches and program assistants. Civic Engagement staff: Cultivate corporate/CBO support and volunteer engagement.

About You

First Name
Caroline
Last Name
Damon
Citizen Schools offers middle school students from low-income communities the opportunity to work together, led by caring adult volunteers, in hands-on projects called “apprenticeships.” As the centerpiece of its afterschool program, apprenticeships bring experts from the community, “Citizen Teachers,” into high-need public schools to teach what they know and love and serve as role models for students. In apprenticeships, students master 21st century skills such as collaboration, communication, global awareness, and problem solving. Working as members of a team to solve problems, they plan collaborative projects, engage in active listening, and evaluate the impact of their choices on others – key learning components in cultivating empathy.

Tell us about your partnerships

We partner with Cesar Chavez Academy in East Palo Alto, and with Joseph George Middle School and William Sheppard Academy in San Jose, high-need middle schools in low-income neighborhoods. We also partner with organizations like HP, Google, Youth Community Service, Stanford University, and Tools for Peace to bring volunteers into the schools, exposing students to caring adult professionals they would not otherwise have the opportunity to meet.

Challenges

Our major challenge is maintaining a robust pipeline of expert volunteers to lead apprenticeships, and providing them with the training and support they need to teach and inspire middle school students. Our strategy includes emphasizing how rewarding it is for volunteers to share their passion and expertise with students from low-income communities each week, and how by being role models and mentors they are helping to close the opportunity gap. Our volunteer “Citizen Teachers” serve as exemplars of empathy as they give their time to help students develop their skills and experience success.

Does your project use any of the following approaches to cultivate community members as empathetic and collaborative leaders?

- Encouraging philanthropy
- Creating a safe space
- Developing emotional competency
- Building leadership skills
- Immersion
- Collective problem-solving
- Identifying shared values and differences
- Instilling courage
- Enabling action

Target Age Group(s)

6-12, 13-17.

Source URL: https://www.changemakers.com/packardempathy/entries/citizen-schools-expanded-learning-time