

Helping the Youth Pay It Forward

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You truly do help yourself when helping others and there is scientific evidence to support this claim. Studies indicate that, in addition to health benefits, volunteering can alleviate many of the problems harming the lives of young people in America including low self-esteem, a lack of a sense of community and unreached educational potential. Efforts to improve educational outcomes through mandated testing and standards have failed thus far. Perhaps it is time for a much better approach.

Many schools are caught in a vicious cycle of trying to handle issues of bullying and delinquent behavior while struggling to maintain high test scores. From the No Child Left Behind Act implemented in 2002 to the more recent Common Core curriculum, legislative figures and educators have been attempting to improve the education system in the United States. However, National Center for Education Statistics reports show that new legislative action has not improved achievement scores, and a 2012 study by the Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice found that increased spending and staffing have not resulted in improved educational outcomes.

We need to recognize that the answer may not be in new legislation but instead in one of the oldest rules. The concept of the golden rule, so prevalent in the history of many world cultures, is largely absent in today's schools. Volunteering to contribute to the lives of others is perhaps the ultimate manifestation of the golden rule, but unfortunately this and developing the character traits associated with helping others such as compassion and empathy are frequently not implemented.

Character education in schools was once considered essential to do well in school and in life. But in the latter part of the twentieth century, most public schools drifted away from this traditional emphasis, resulting in "disastrous consequences for the well-being of youth and society".¹ There is now a renewed interest in character education, as the development of good citizenship is as critical to the youth and society as academic achievement.

In addition to boosting grades and attitudes towards education, volunteering improves self-esteem and one's sense of belonging, which are ranked as the third and fourth most important human needs in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Social connectedness may not seem relevant today, with social media profiles often displaying hundreds of friends. However, as Dr. Stephen Post told us in his interview for *Project Pay It Forward*, "Social scientists are telling us that there is an erosion in social capital... there's a loss of deeper, meaningful friendship and volunteering can help people establish those kinds of deeper relationships."

[*Project Pay It Forward*](#) is produced by Student Body of America Association, a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization. The program encourages students to volunteer through media, character education curriculum and grant opportunities for youth organizations. All contributions help to support children and education through the nonprofit program. By inspiring youth to pay it forward, we can empower them to improve their own lives and their communities.

Watch the extended preview here: <http://www.projectpayitforward.org/preview>

¹ Lapsley, D., & Yeager, D. "Moral-Character education." In I. Weiner (Ed.), *Handbook of psychology* (pp. 1--42). New York: Wiley.

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http://www3.nd.edu/~dlapsle1/Lab/Articles_&_Chapters_files/Laps%20Yeager%20Moral%20Character%20Education.docx