

Read the “Should Students Do Activities to Improve Schools?” passage set.

**Should Students Do Activities to Improve Schools?**

**Source 1: Starting with a Clean Slate . . . and  
a Lot of Paint!**

by Marcia Amidon Lusted

- 1        Look at the outside walls of your school. Are they nice looking? Clean? Freshly painted? Maybe, but maybe not. For many kids who live in the Los Angeles area, the walls around them are covered with graffiti or peeling paint, or they are just plain dull. But thanks to Operation Clean Slate, kids have been getting involved and turning those ugly walls into something bright and interesting.
- 2        It all started when a man named Michael Howard was driving to work. . . . He noticed a white wall with red graffiti all over it. Soon he was noticing more and more graffiti everywhere he went. Howard was a teacher . . . and finally one day he asked his students why they messed up the walls of their neighborhoods with graffiti. The answer surprised him. Writing on walls made them feel important, and it gave them a feeling of recognition, they told him. From there Howard started thinking about what these kids could do to the walls instead of plastering them with graffiti. Why not create public art, something beautiful and lasting? And that’s how Operation Clean Slate (OCS) was born. . . .
- 3        Eighteen years later, OCS has helped kids paint more than 700 murals just in the Los Angeles area alone, as well as more in other countries. More than 24,000 volunteers have helped them. Most volunteers are kids who are helping to make their own schools and public buildings more beautiful. OCS works with any school to help them paint their own mural. Once the school decides what they want to paint and where, and raises the money for paint and other supplies, OCS helps them get started. It usually takes anywhere between 10 and 50 volunteers to paint a mural, and from one to 10 days of painting time.
- 4        Murals can be of anything. Not only do they involve kids and make schools more beautiful, but they also carry important messages. . . . They can boost school spirit and make kids feel better about their school. Colorful walls reduce graffiti vandalism and make people feel better when they look at them!

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## Source 2: Growing a Schoolyard Garden

adapted from an article by Jeannine Pao

5        The bell rings. Finally, it’s lunchtime. Do you know where your lunch came from? Around the country, there are programs that teach kids to think about where they get their food.

6        The students . . . created their garden from scratch. In an abandoned lot next to their school, they pulled weeds . . . . Under the weeds and junk, the soil they found was not in good condition for growing food. So the students planted something called cover crops. (When these plants grow, they get plowed back into the soil to provide food for the soil. It’s like growing your own fertilizer!) The students also added lots of compost. This rich soil is produced when vegetation (leaves, grass clippings, banana peels, apple cores, and more) rots and breaks down. Adding compost is a great way to enrich garden soil.

7        Sure, gardening is hard work. But the students have a lot of fun, too. . . . Not only do they get to play in the dirt, they have to.

8        But the best part of the garden experience is eating, of course. The students eat peas in their pods and tomatoes right off the vine. They snack on berries and edible flowers as they work. (This is safe because the Edible Schoolyard doesn’t use any chemical fertilizers or pesticides.) Once food has been harvested in the garden, students take it to the kitchen classroom. Here, the students do everything—from chopping and cooking to setting the table with tablecloths, silverware, and flowers from the garden. Each day, the students make delicious, healthy dishes. They sit down together to share what they have prepared. After eating what they’ve made, they take the kitchen scraps out to the garden where they’re used for compost to help grow more food.

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## Source 3: Keep Students Focused on Schoolwork

by Luz Chavez

9        Having students do jobs around school, such as gardening and painting, sounds like a good idea at first. Students learn how to be responsible. They practice working in groups. They keep the school looking great. However, there are many reasons these jobs should be left to adults.

10       Students lead busy lives. They have classwork, homework, after-school activities, and chores at home. Many parents are already concerned that their children have too much homework. Teachers often worry about having enough classroom time to teach and prepare students. Many kids need tutoring and this extra time spent outside of the classroom would keep them from being able to get help. Students’ classroom time is precious. Schools should focus on preparing students for academic success.

## Grade 4 Scoring Sampler Passage Set and Prompt

- 11 Having to do all of that work outside of class would also cut down on a student's time to have fun. Many kids like to unwind by playing video games, watching their favorite TV show, or playing after school sports or other school activities.
- 12 The need for supervision is another reason not to have students do jobs to improve school grounds. Schools don't have to take care of or closely watch adult workers. Adults know to work carefully. They know how quickly or slowly to do a job. They know how to handle different types of tools. They are less likely to hurt themselves or make mistakes.
- 13 A hallway painted by an adult is likely to look better than a hallway painted by a child. Sure, a child can decorate a hallway. But painting a hallway is a job for a professional. Professionals won't leave spots or stains. They won't accidentally paint on windows. Also, it is not the kids' job to clean up the school. While some kids may like this, others will not enjoy it. Students have a job to do well in school. A painter has a job to paint. Kids should not be doing that.
- 14 Yes, school gardens and cleanup efforts, such as picking up trash or painting walls, can teach children the value of work. But with the many dangers these tasks present, the jobs are better left in the hands of adults. When in school, students should focus on learning in the classroom.

"Keep Students Focused on Schoolwork" by Luz Chavez. Written for educational purposes.

# Writing Prompt

The teachers in your school are planning activities for students. Write an essay for your teacher in which you give your opinion about whether students should do activities to improve schools. Use information from the passages in your essay.

Manage your time carefully so that you can

- read the passages;
- plan your response;
- write your response; and
- revise and edit your response.

Be sure to include

- an introduction;
- support for your opinion using information from the passages; and
- a conclusion that is related to your opinion.

Your response should be in the form of a multiparagraph essay. Write your response in the space provided.