

## Civic and Character Education in Utah Schools

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Civic Education is a predominant theme in all areas of public school education in Utah. The recently adopted Life Skills document outlines the state's goals for education. It advocates in its preface that

“...students become productively engaged citizens endowed with the knowledge, skills, dispositions, and confidence to participate fully in democratic life. It is our hope that students will be active participants in and out of the classroom in American citizenship, with many of the same values, dreams and goals of the founding fathers for free, responsible, productive, and happy living.”

The National Council on Social Studies has identified 4 major themes, which are (1) global interconnectedness, (2) continuity and change over time, (3) governance, and (4) rights and responsibilities. These are re-emphasized in social studies classes throughout the k-12 curriculum. They provide a framework for the study of representative democracy.

A listing of core social studies classes follows:

4 <sup>th</sup> grade ....Utah Studies	8 <sup>th</sup> grade.....United States History I
5 <sup>th</sup> grade.....United States Studies	10 <sup>th</sup> grade....World Civilizations and Geography for Life
6 <sup>th</sup> grade.....World Studies	11 <sup>th</sup> grade....United States History II
7 <sup>th</sup> grade.....Utah Studies	12 <sup>th</sup> grade....United States Government and Citizenship

Students in these courses closely examine the core documents that prepare them for full civic participation. The 12<sup>th</sup> grade course in citizenship focuses on American ideals such as representative democracy, the constitution and the rule of law, levels of government, civic rights and responsibilities, majority rule, and the free enterprise system. The core curriculum for these courses may be found on the website at

<http://www.schools.utah.gov/curr/socialstudies/core/default.htm>.

**Academic Service Learning**, passed by board resolution in 2004, advocates involvement of all students in curriculum-connected service to the community. Such service promotes the common good, and encourages participation with community partners. Students involved in this practice have numerous opportunities to build character through work they accomplish together to solve community issues. The State Board of Education encourages Academic Service Learning implementation in every curriculum, and affects thousands of Utah students through service learning grants from Learn and Serve America.

**Life Skills** is a statewide program that encourages education of the whole child. Character and Social and Civic Responsibility are two of the seven domains in the Life Skills document. Utah educators are active in the teaching of honesty, integrity, morality, civility, duty, honor, service, and obedience to law as specified by Utah Code 53A-13-109. They focus on student knowledge, skills and dispositions for civic engagement that are molded and developed in all areas of the school. These are fundamental in order to teach children so that they can make informed decisions and become competent, well educated citizens with a commitment to the common good in a democratic society. All Utah secondary schools must provide evidence of Life Skills integration as they meet requirements for state accreditation. The Life Skills document is online at <http://www.schools.utah.gov/curr/lifeskills>

Many districts and schools throughout the state have adopted particular civic and character education programs that complement the school's mission. Among these is the "**We the People**" project that emphasizes student knowledge of the constitution. Utah's **Mock Trial** competition gives students hands-on experience with the judicial system. **Mock Election** and **Project Citizen**, give practical civic experience in voting procedures and community problem solving. Hundreds of Utah teachers have been trained in the essentials of the first amendment through the **3Rs** program. As a result, Utah has 4 First Amendment Schools. Many schools have also initiated whole-school character education programs.

State Office specialists continue to meet with civic organizations to co-sponsor and collaborate on activities for students and teachers. Among these organizations are: the Utah Coalition for Civic, Character and Service Learning, the Utah Commission on Volunteers, the Utah Federation for Youth, Power in You, and Utah Courts Outreach. It is hoped that such collaborative work will result in the development of school and community partnerships and in civically engaged students that are knowledgeable about community resources.

These efforts are designed to provide multiple opportunities for students to obtain knowledge, skills, and dispositions that will lead them to meaningful, participatory citizenship. It is the responsibility of all teachers, administrators, and staff to model the ideals of citizenship and seek evidence of student civic engagement.