

Civic and Character Education Report

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Utah State Board of Education / Utah State Office of Education

Civic and Character Education Report 2014

Civic and character education is central to the mission of public education in Utah. The Utah State Board of Education (USBE) has committed to the perpetuation of freedom, with its guiding mission document “Promises to Keep:”

Utah’s Public Education System is created in the state Constitution to “secure and perpetuate” freedom. Freedom, as envisioned in the Utah Constitution, is a promise to future generations that requires:

- *Citizen participation in civic and political affairs.*
- *Economic prosperity for the community.*
- *Strong moral and social values.*
- *Loyalty and commitment to constitutional government.*

This mission is supported in Utah statute 53A-13-109. The USBE agrees wholeheartedly that public schools fulfill a vital purpose in the preparation of succeeding generations of informed and responsible citizens who are deeply attached to essential democratic values and institutions.

As the statute states, the USBE is committed to ensuring that through an integrated curriculum, students shall be taught in connection with regular school work: honesty, integrity, morality, civility, duty, honor, service, and obedience to law; respect for and an understanding of the Declaration of Independence and the constitutions of the United States and of the state of Utah; Utah history, including territorial and pre-territorial development to the present; the essentials and benefits of the free enterprise system; respect for parents, home, and family; the dignity and necessity of honest labor; and other skills, habits, and qualities of character which will promote an upright and desirable citizenry and better prepare students to recognize and accept responsibility for preserving and defending the blessings of liberty inherited from prior generations and secured by the constitution.

Putting that vision into policy and then into practice is the work of both the USBE and the Utah State Office of Education (USOE). Civic and character education is implemented in an integrated way throughout the agency and in a variety of its programs.

There are many proven practices that can result in effective civic and character education in public schools, but in particular the leading research in civic education focuses on six areas:

1. Classroom Instruction: Schools should provide instruction in government, history, economics, law, and democracy.
2. Discussion of Current Events: Schools should incorporate discussion of current local, national, and international issues and events into the classroom, particularly those that young people view as important to their lives.
3. Service-Learning: Schools should design and implement programs that provide students with the opportunity to apply what they learn through performing community service that is linked to the formal curriculum and classroom instruction.
4. Extracurricular Activities: Schools should offer opportunities for young people to get involved in their schools or communities outside of the classroom.
5. School Governance: Schools should encourage student participation in school governance.
6. Simulations of Governmental Processes: Schools should encourage students to participate in simulations of democratic processes and procedures.

In particular, this report will address classroom instruction, the inclusion of current events in core standards, promoting school governance opportunities for students, and promoting the simulation of governmental processes, as these are the areas where the USBE has the most direct impact.

Classroom Instruction/Current Events

Clearly, civic and character education has a home in the curricular area of social studies. Civics and civic-mindedness are a central component of the core curriculum standards beginning with a child's entry into kindergarten and continuing until their senior year. Civics is also supported with the study of political science topics including the study of foundational documents in American history, e.g. the Constitution and Declaration of Independence. The study of history is also the study of character, and students encounter inspiring examples of outstanding character whenever the core standards created by the USOE and adopted by the USBE are then implemented in Utah classrooms. Our current social studies core standards, created by Utah teachers and stakeholders, address every component called for in the statute, most often addressed more than once and with increasing complexity as students advance in their coursework.

With the incorporation of the literacy expectations in the Utah core has come an increased emphasis on the skills necessary to be an active and contributing member of the community. The skills necessary to become fluent in civic life include the ability to compare and contextualize, craft arguments using evidence, interpret and synthesize information, conduct research, evaluate sources, and write and speak with precision and clarity.

In addition, the revision of the core performance standards in social studies at both the secondary and elementary levels will continue to focus on developing these essential civic skills. The focus on student performance will reinforce the integration of these skills into practice.

While there is no statewide assessment of social studies courses in Utah, and thus no statewide civics proficiency data, there is an effort as part of the comprehensive work on educator performance evaluation to include non-tested subjects and grades in that data collection. Student learning objectives are being created and piloted that will help social studies teachers assess student mastery of essential civic skills and content.

Civic and character education is not the sole province of social studies, and below are examples of how other content areas help perpetuate freedom and promote character in an integrated fashion.

Elementary Mathematics

Students in elementary mathematics classrooms are expected and encouraged to work together to solve problems. They become proficient at sticking with a task until they find an acceptable solution. They do so both in groups and individually. They learn the value of cooperation, of expressing their opinions freely, and of backing up those opinions with evidence. These are all desirable character traits, supported and reinforced by the core standard expectations.

The goal in elementary mathematics is threefold – students need to understand the concepts of mathematics, to be able to use those concepts in procedures and algorithms fluently, and to apply mathematics to real world problems. Doing so leads to students who are better able to be civically involved in their communities by thinking logically, analytically, and quantitatively, by understanding the parameters of problems, and by being able to contribute to the solution of those problems. Students who enter into STEM fields have rich opportunities to contribute to society, and those thinking patterns are set in elementary school mathematics classes.

Secondary Mathematics

The Utah Standards of Mathematical Practice contain components that are also relevant in civic and character education. These standards are explicit in describing practices that are developed in the mathematics classroom, but extend elsewhere, such as perseverance and precise communication. USOE professional learning has been focused on developing classrooms where respectful and meaningful conversations about mathematics take place and where students learn to work independently and with others. Mathematics classrooms require responsibility for individual work, respectfulness in collaboration, and integrity.

English Language Arts

In ELA classes, students understand that plagiarism is not allowed, and that honest work is valued and vital. Teamwork and collaboration are supported through a continuing focus on small-group work and shared writing projects. The narratives and informational texts students use are filled with stories and examples of exemplary qualities of character.

Instructional Materials

Materials are reviewed by specialists and highly qualified teachers to make certain that classroom content aligns with core standards, and promotes achievement by Utah's students. Specifically related to Character and Civic Education are efforts to see that materials support the mission of the USBE and strong moral and social values.

Youth in Custody

Students supported by the Youth in Custody line item receive life skills instruction, and character & civic education from all four collaborative partners: the Department of Human Services, the Department of Juvenile Justice Services, the Division of Child and Family Services and the Local Educational Agencies (LEAs). Collaboration with community partners help in the development of student competencies necessary to participate fully in a democratic life.

Adult Education

Adult students are provided character and civic education through individualized and group literacy instruction whether they are enrolled in a school district or community-based non-profit organization funded with state line item or federal WIA II funds.

Prevention Dimensions

This curriculum supports teaching and modeling character education traits that are an important component of an effective comprehensive prevention system. Prevention Dimensions (PD) is a set of resource lessons which support the Utah State Office of Education pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade health core and Utah's Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities.

Youth Court

The Youth Court program is a community-based intervention/prevention designed to provide an alternative response for the juvenile justice system for the first-time, nonviolent, mis-

demeanor juvenile offenders, in which community youth determine the appropriate sanctions for the offender. The program holds youth offenders accountable and provides educational services to offenders and youth volunteers in an effort to promote long-term behavioral change that leads to enhanced public safety.

Suicide and Bullying Prevention

These prevention efforts support civic and character education in our schools. Civic and character education helps a student develop resiliency. Resiliency helps a student to navigate their way to the psychological, social, cultural, and physical situations while they sustain their well-being, and give them the ability individually and collectively to contribute to society. Suicide and bullying prevention promotes well-being, serves as a resource to educators, and supports districts by sponsoring professional development.

Research has proven when students feel connected to people in their schools; they are less likely to attempt or complete suicide, and creating a community where all students can learn is a clear goal for anyone committed to civic and character education.

School Governance

The USOE has coordinated the administration of the Student Leadership Skills Pilot program, an effort to incorporate and develop student leadership skills in K-6 public schools. The schools in the program have incorporated a variety of approaches, from targeted student council programs to school-wide implementation of leadership principles. The pilot is beginning the second year of implementation, and initial reports from the first cohort are enthusiastic and optimistic about the impact on the civic skills and character development of their students.

Simulations of Civic Processes

The USOE supported or participated in a range of outreach efforts that promote civic processes. For example, the USOE works to support the Utah Bar's outreach efforts on and around Constitution Day, when over 276 teaching opportunities, -- up from 193 in 2013 -- and including classrooms, assemblies, and community youth councils, had a direct lesson on the United States Constitution and simulate a mock trial. Volunteer judges, attorneys and law school students visited schools statewide.

The USBE also coordinated last year's Civics Symposium to celebrate the sesquicentennial of the Gettysburg Address and supporting outreach efforts for the Gettysburg Address commemoration known as GettyReady.

The USOE promoted and coordinated school field trips to the Utah State Capitol and Utah State Courts, distributing funds earmarked for field trip reimbursement. In addition, USOE staff serve on the Utah State Court's Judicial Outreach Committee. In cooperation with the State Courts, over 900 students from Utah K-12 schools visited the Matheson Courthouse.

In addition, the USOE supported and participated in teacher professional development including Creating Extraordinary Citizens, a three-day intensive course with practical strategies for encouraging civic and character education as well as the Utah Standards Academy sessions held across the state that provided instruction in the active simulation of civic processes.

With financial support from the Utah Commission on Civic and Character Education, the USOE partnered with UEN in the creation and delivery of an on-line Civics course designed specifically for teachers who wanted to incorporate more civics education in their classrooms. The course was well-received and now exists as an existing on-line resource available for future offerings.

The USOE coordinated the United States Senate Youth competition, an annual event where student leaders compete for the opportunity to spend a week in Washington, D.C. as the guests of the United States Senate and for unrestricted college scholarship funds. The competition allows students to share a portfolio of their leadership and community service experiences, and they simulate a mock congressional hearing as part of the day.

Mock trials and other simulations also have a strong presence in Utah schools. The USOE supports the work of Law-Related Education in their promotion of the Mock Trial and "We the People" programs. These programs simulate deliberative processes and encourage the active civic engagement of the participants. 83 teams competed in 101 mock trials. Over 300 students participated in the "We the People" competitions.

Conclusion

The USBE has a commitment to secure and perpetuate freedom by providing the strongest public education system possible for the students of Utah. Establishing high standards, providing the supports to provide high-quality instruction, and continuing to focus on civic and character education as fundamental elements of the constitutional responsibility of public education shall be a continuing emphasis and focus in public schools.