

# English Language/Civics Education (EL/Civics)

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## Introduction:

English Literacy and Civics Education Program (EL/Civics) is an integrated English literacy and civics education program that assists immigrants and refugees with limited English skills to acquire basic skills needed to function effectively as parents, employees and citizens. The teaching of U.S. history and government and preparing immigrants to pass the U.S. citizenship exam have been integral part of curriculum and immigrant education for well over a century. In 1906, a statute was enacted that required citizenship applicants to demonstrate ability in speaking English. In response, community organizations including settlement houses and labor unions organized classes in English and citizenship. Until the mid 1900s, immigration officials granted immigrants U.S. citizenship based on their ability to speak English. Often the sole requirement for citizenship was proof of lawful U.S. residency for five years. In 1950, a federal law mandated an increase in the reading/writing skill levels, making it more difficult for immigrants to become citizens. In the late 1980s, the Immigration Reform and Control Act granted limited amnesty and permanent residence to undocumented immigrants who followed a specific application process and received at least 40 hours of English instruction. In 1996, changes in the federal law limited some of the rights immigrants had held including access to government services and food stamps. This resulted in resurgence of immigrants seeking citizenship to protect their interests. Although some of the measures of 1996 have been eliminated or amended, obtaining citizenship still remains a goal of many adults learning English. Becoming a citizen assures an individual the right to vote, hold a passport, sponsor family members for immigration, and receive social security benefits upon retirement. Today nearly 50% of adults enrolled in federally funded education courses are English language students.

Federal funding is granted to programs as defined by the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA) to assist adults in learning English while also learning about civil rights, civic participation and responsibility, and obtaining citizenship. State funding may also be used to support English Speakers of Other Language (ESOL) programming. The purpose of the U.S. Department of Education's English Literacy and Civics (EL/Civics) Education funding is to support programs in providing academic instruction to immigrants and refugees increasing their access to English literacy programs focused specifically on civics education. *Civics education* is defined by the *Federal Register* (1999) as "an educational program that emphasizes contextualized instruction on the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, naturalization procedures, civic participation, and U.S. history and government to help students acquire the skills and knowledge to become active and informed parents, workers, and community members." EL/Civics classes introduce students to civics-related content and provide them with opportunities to apply that knowledge in their daily lives while building their English language and literacy skills.

## **Purpose:**

Regardless of the type of program (school district or community-based organization) and funding (state and/or federal), EL/Civics Education should be included in a general ESOL class or specifically designated classes that highlight learning English in a civics education context. The purposes of the class are to:

- Provide instruction on how to gain U.S. citizenship.
- Provide instruction about U.S. history and culture, including lessons on diversity and multiculturalism.
- Provide instruction and guidance for students on becoming active participants in their local communities as residents, parents, workers and community members.

## **Local Program Responsibilities:**

Programs offering EL/Civics Education programs must provide assurance that adult education program rules are adhered to.

Prior to receiving services, an EL/Civics student must have completed the enrollment process and have met Enrollee Status, including intake, full assessment, the creation of a Student Education Occupational Plan (SEOP) based on the established Entering Functioning Level (EFL), the completion of 12 contact hours, and the establishment of a funding code.

Programs must provide assurance that EL/Civics AEFLA funds are used specifically to:

- Provide instruction on how to gain U.S. citizenship.
- Provide instruction about U.S. history and culture, including diversity and multiculturalism.
- Provide instruction and guidance on becoming active participants within the local community.

Curriculum materials chosen must be current, adult oriented, of the appropriate language and literacy proficiency levels, and culturally sensitive.

Classroom activities should appeal to adult students with a variety of learning styles and incorporate the learners' previous knowledge and experience.

Student data and outcomes will be gathered and reported using the Utah Online Performance Information for Adult Education (UTopia) system.

The National Reporting Systems (NRS) Educational Functioning Level Tables (as follows) serve as a baseline for a student's entry level into an EL/Civics program.

## **Defining Civics Education:**

English literacy and civics education is an integrated English literacy and Civics education program that assists immigrants and refugees with limited English skills to acquire basic skills needed to function effectively as parents, employees and citizens. For adult English language students, civics education is a broad term that includes providing instruction about United States history and culture, lessons on diversity and multiculturalism, and instruction and guidance on becoming active participants in their new communities.

The content of EL/Civics classes includes the history and structure of the U.S. government (i.e., the executive, legislative, and judicial branches), the geographical history and current geopolitical structure of the country, the roles and responsibilities of the president and the White House, and the U.S. legal and education systems. These are the components of a curriculum designed to guide students in becoming knowledgeable citizens and active community members.

EL/Civics education must cover civics content in a structured, deliberate way. Additionally, students' individual academic goals must also be determined and addressed. For example, students in EL/Civics classes may need specific direct instruction on the procedures and content required for citizenship examination. Others may want to learn about U.S. history and government to ease the process of settling in the United States and becoming informed, confident members of society.

Significant civics content can be imparted at all ESOL levels at the same time students are acquiring English.

Beginning-level students can:

- Learn about U.S. communities, government, and history through pre-reading and hands-on activities while they develop the fine motor skills needed for writing.
- Alphabetize names of states, label maps, and practice sight words from the names of local, state, and federal officeholders' institutions and agencies in their community (such as the library and community center), as well as match pictures of institutions and people with their names and titles.
- Practice their speaking and listening skills as they share their opinions about important social or political issues pertinent to themselves and their local community.
- Using pictures cut from magazines, students can make collages that represent their communities.
- Play simple games, such as Bingo and Concentration, to reinforce words students have been working with in the content unit.
- Take tours of community places or events, both virtual (via the Internet) and real.

Intermediate-level students can:

- Participate in reading and writing activities about American culture and history.
- Prepare and present oral reports pertaining to what they have learned.

Advanced-level students can:

- Invite local officials to speak to the class.
- Volunteer in community organizations.
- Practice writing skills by writing letters to the editor, e-mailing members of Congress, or researching and writing essays about an aspect of American history or culture.

An important objective of all civics education classes is to help immigrants learn how to seek and use the assistance of others to learn rules and procedures in order to assimilate smoothly into their new community and country. Civics instruction should provide a basis for understanding the rights and responsibilities of citizens and a framework for competent and responsible participation.

The Utah ESOL Content Standards are consistent in outlining the skills for each proficiency level across all programs in the state. They are aligned with the standards developed by the National Institute for Literacy and the National Reporting System (NRS), which describes the levels of proficiency and provides benchmarks for the BEST Literacy *and* BEST Plus or CASAS standardized testing.

When planning instruction, teachers should look for ways to link the Content Standards within the context of the student’s academic goals. The standards should be used as guidelines for identifying skills and the learning context of the program’s curriculum.

The Content Standards are organized according to ESOL program level:

- Beginning Literacy ESOL
- Low Beginning ESOL
- High Beginning ESOL
- Low Intermediate ESOL
- High Intermediate ESOL
- Advanced ESOL

The four learning Proficiencies—reading, writing, listening/speaking, and supporting grammar—and related standards, assessments, competencies and instructional resources are included in the Utah ESOL/ELCivics Education Content Standards and Program Instructional Resources.