

# Civic and Character Education Report



Prepared by the  
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# **Utah State Board of Education**

## **Civic and Character Education Report 2016**

Civic and character education is central to the mission of public education in Utah. This mission is supported in Utah statute 53A-13-109. The Utah State Board of Education (USBE) agrees wholeheartedly that public schools fulfill a vital purpose in the preparation of succeeding generations of informed and responsible citizens who are committed to essential democratic values and institutions.

The USBE is charged in statute with ensuring that, through an integrated curriculum and regular school work, students shall be taught 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.

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 civics and the discussion 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 U.S. 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. Our most recent secondary standards, currently under revision, emphasize the importance of civics as a cornerstone of each course. In addition, the core standards at the secondary level are currently under revision.

With this revision, the writing team has made a concerted effort to include civics concepts and demonstrations of civic competency within every course. While Utah studies seems like a natural course to learn about the role and functions of government, Geography or World Civilizations may not seem like a course where civics concepts can be taught. However, the writing team has made sure to find natural connections between the course content and civics.

With the incorporation of the literacy expectations in the Utah core, there 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.

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

There is, however, a new graduation requirement of a basic civics test. This (local education agency (LEA) administered assessment is not a state assessment, but has provided an opportunity to reinforce the importance of civic education in Utah classrooms. USBE staff worked with the Utah Education Network (UEN) to create on-line resources that would make the implementation of this requirement as seamless as possible. LEAs can access a sample test based on the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) naturalization test questions, and can find additional civics resources, test preparation, a frequently-asked-questions page, and examples of how to enhance the basic test so that there are more cognitively-rigorous tasks associated with the assessment. The civics test graduation requirement has been successfully implemented by schools across the state.

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.

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 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. USBE 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 our ELA classes, students are taught that plagiarism is not allowed, and that honest work is valued and vital. Teamwork and collaboration are promoted in a continuing focus on small-group work and shared writing projects. Narratives and informational texts students use are filled with stories and examples of persons with 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 student achievement in Utah. 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 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 Board 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, misdemeanor 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 to individually and collectively 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. Creating a community where all students can learn is a clear goal for anyone committed to civic and character education.

## **School Governance**

The USBE 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. 66 schools in 29 districts participated. The schools in the program have incorporated a variety of approaches, from targeted student council programs to school-wide implementation of leadership principles. The program moved from a pilot to a program that was earmarked to receive ongoing funding, however that funding did not materialize in the 2016 legislative session. The evaluations from participating schools are enthusiastic and optimistic about the impact on the civic skills and character development of their students.

## **Simulations of Civic Processes**

The USBE supported or participated in a range of outreach efforts that promote civic processes. USBE staff assisted the Utah State Bar with the promotion of the 800<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Magna Carta, promoting school visits to the traveling exhibit, assisting with the publicity of essay and video contests, and helping serve as judges of student competitions.

In addition, the USBE works to support the Utah Bar's outreach efforts on and around Constitution Day. Volunteers visited over 170 classrooms, assemblies, and community youth councils to provide a direct lesson on the United States Constitution or simulate a mock trial. Volunteer judges, attorneys and law school students visited schools statewide. This program has become an institutionalized and expected offering in schools across the state. Teachers look forward every year to hear from these guest speakers as they work to connect students with the larger community of civically-engaged people.

The USBE staff also support the Utah History Day competitions. 5,264 students from across the state participated. Students from 85 separate schools across the state showcased projects of historical research and 400 advanced in contests from the district level to a state competition. The 60 top state entries advanced to compete in the National History Day competition in Washington, DC.

The USBE promoted and coordinated school field trips to the Utah State Capitol and Utah State Courts, distributing funds earmarked for field trip reimbursement. With an appropriation of \$150,000 in 2015, 12,774 students from 33 districts and public charters were able to visit the Capitol. \$75,000 was appropriated in the 2016 legislative session, and those funds have already been encumbered to support schools with visits to the Capitol in the 2016-2017 school year. These funds were coupled with a new initiative to provide the best pre-field-trip and post-field-trip materials so that the Capitol experience can have the most academic impact.

In addition, USBE 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, learning in-depth lessons about the importance of an independent judiciary.

With financial support from the Utah Commission on Civic and Character Education, the USBE partnered with UEN in the creation and delivery of an on-line Civics resource page and 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 USBE 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. 35 students participated in this competition, representing 21 districts and public charters, and 27 separate high schools.

Mock trials and other simulations also have a strong presence in Utah schools. The USBE supports the work of Law-Related Education (LRE) 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. More than 1,000 junior and senior high school students on 80 mock trial teams participated in 110 mock trials statewide as part of the LRE Mock Trial Program, supported by 350 attorneys and 100 community representatives.

Over 300 students participated in the "We the People" competitions, mock congressional hearings held at the Utah State Bar Law and Justice Center. These competitions prepare students with essential civic skills, and the high school winning team, Sky View, competed at the national competition along with 1,200 peers from across the country.

## **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 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.