

EDUCATIONAL



THE UTAH STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION
Report to Legislative Committee

CIVIC AND CHARACTER EDUCATION

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Civic and Character Education

STATUTORY REQUIREMENT

U.C.A. Section 53A-13-109

requires the State Board of Education to submit an annual report to the Education Interim Committee on H.B. 22 (2004).

This report has been submitted annually since 2005.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is provided to the Utah State Legislature to highlight the methods used and the results being achieved, to instruct and prepare students to become informed and responsible citizens through an integrated curriculum taught in connection with regular school work.

BACKGROUND

Civic and character education are both essential pillars that support the mission of public schools. Utah teachers and schools take this responsibility very seriously, and work diligently and creatively to provide content and pedagogy that supports effective civic and character education.

The Utah State Board of Education (USBE) is committed to the language used in the statute in question. The expectation is 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.

FINDINGS

Putting this vision into policy and then into practice is the work of both the USBE and LEA's. 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, classroom instruction, the inclusion of current events in core standards, promoting school governance opportunities for students, and promoting the simulation of governmental processes, are the areas where the USBE has the most direct impact. 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. The newly revised secondary standards, approved in 2016, include specific references to civic preparation in every course description. These standards are the bedrock upon which classroom instruction is based.

One of the most instructive ways to learn about the range of approaches being used to provide civics and character education is to hear the stories of educators themselves. Here are some of the ways that teachers are making a difference regarding civic and character education, in their own words.

Charter School High School Teacher: I am attempting to instill in my students an ability to have effective dialogue over having mindless debate. Dialogue, I believe, is much more effective in the political arena than debate is. Changing your mind in a dialogue should be much more respected than standing your ground in a debate. In addition, I'm trying to get my students to learn to see from other perspectives, thus allowing them to understand decisions and experiences from all points of view. Finally, I'm teaching them how to determine what sources are credible and what sources are not, an incredibly important skill in the political world of today.

Urban District High School Teacher: One assignment I give as part of the local government unit is to have students attend a City Council, Planning Commission, Parks & Rec, or School Board Meeting. They are required to take notes on the meeting and write about what they learned about local issues and the leaders in their community. Those who cannot attend the meeting are given an alternate assignment in which they email a school board member or city council member about an issue of their choice. They must CC me on the email and response, then write a paper about their experience with local leadership and the importance of being involved in the community. I also use things like current events, debates about relevant issues, have students check the voting records of their representatives on the state and federal level, etc.

Urban District Elementary Teacher: Each year I teach during an election year, I hold formal voting. We study the platforms of the candidates, sometimes we hold our own debates, or at least do a writing activity where each student writes a persuasive essay why that particular candidate would be best for America. We discuss

strengths and weaknesses of all candidates. We also look at past booths require-the students must bring some kind of identification with their address, etc. I want them to understand the process and leaders, and identify the characteristics that great leaders need to the privilege they will have as a registered voter, and to be able to make an informed decision. Once the votes are in and tallied, it doesn't stop there. We talk about it the day after, how they felt about the actual outcome in the nation, what the news reports, voter reactions, etc. We talk about how to support a candidate you may not have voted for. We also hold classroom elections for class president, vice president, and a secretary. We identify the jobs they need to do, why the job is important, and what will happen if the person does not follow through with the job.

Suburban District Elementary Teacher: I am a sixth grade teacher who is committed to preparing my students to be responsible citizens and respecters of American History and our government. Additionally, my school has adopted The Leader in Me, a Stephen Covey leadership program for schools. As part of developing leaders, each child has at least a classroom responsibility if not a school leadership position. The students apply for jobs and are interviewed by faculty, staff, and volunteers. They dress for success on those days and they learn valuable skills in interfacing with adults and peers. As part of the daily routine, my students run the Class Business time entirely on their own. I do not need to be present to tell them what to do. They do the Pledge of Allegiance, Civics Questions, Leadership Skill of the Week, Mission Statements, Growth Mindset Quote, and Announcements. When we first go over the Civics questions, we take the time to discuss what it means.

My goal is to make this enduring knowledge for them. At the end of the week, the kids take a quiz on the civics questions. I may not get through all one hundred questions, but they should solidly know the answers and the background of the questions we have covered. I also like to sprinkle in rousing stories of the American Revolution and other tidbits of American History that I love so well. Every student at Woods Cross Elementary has a job in the classroom and grades 2-6 can apply for a Student Action Team. Some of the Student Action Teams include Student Leadership Council, Encouragement, Recess, Safety, PTA, STEAM, Art, and Technology Teams. We meet monthly to discuss things that are going right, things that need to change and any other topic as needed. With The

Leader in Me, students learn what it means to Be Proactive, to Begin with the End in Mind, Put First Things First, Think Win-Win, Seek First to Understand, Synergize, and to Sharpen the Saw. It is so empowering for students and staff to have a common language to create solutions. This is our fourth year of building leaders. We know we must be doing something right when half of the 7th grade student government leaders last year were Woods Cross Elementary alumni. I will know, in six years, if my former students still remember the basics we covered in sixth grade.

Charter School Elementary Teacher: Each year in our school's government course, students submit their own legislation for approval in our class government. The bill travels from the writing process to the committee feedback and voting process to the final voting stages. The students learn how to make concessions to pass their bills and to persuade others to accept their arguments.

Urban District High School Teacher: Each year I assign the seniors in my government class a project to identify an issue within their community that they would like to change. They then have to create a presentation which they would give to a city or county council or the school board. The presentation should address the problem and possible solutions including funding options. This requires them to do research within their local governments and often requires them to talk to local officials to gather information. On some occasions the presentations are strong enough that I have invited these government officials to come to my classroom and have the students present to them. A second thing I like to do is invite government officials to my class to talk to students. I have had city counselors, state representatives, and even a federal judge from the Utah federal district court as guests and that makes the experience real for the students.

Urban District Elementary Teacher: I always begin my new school year with a unit on the government, including the three branches and their responsibilities, the 27 amendments and what they mean and how they apply, and the meaning of the preamble. We study how laws are created and discuss laws or rules they would like to see enacted. We hold a mock trial that is scripted, and then throughout the year, my students continue to hold trials that they write themselves. Some examples are: the Boston Massacre and who should be held responsible, civil rights acts, and many times any questionable activity that comes up in class.

Suburban District Elementary Teacher: As a 5th grade teacher we feel it is important to teach our students to be informed and responsible citizens. One way we do this is by learning songs that show respect to those who have served and tell about what a great place this country is. We present this concert at a parents night, the students invite their parents and family members who have served in the armed forces or are first responders to come and attend. It is a moving tribute to these fine Americans.

Urban Charter School Principal: We have a character education program that is built upon the acronym: RISE: Respect Inclusion Safety Empathy. Students are assigned to a RISE advisor to meet as a group weekly. RISE is the foundation of our discipline and behavior expectations. In addition, we use the curriculum from several programs: Choose Love Movement, No Bully, and Shifting Boundaries.

Suburban High School Teacher: Each year, in January, my students follow a bill through the legislative process. Steps include: finding a bill that interests them, emailing their own representatives (and any others they wish), and tracking the bill to its conclusion. If possible, I take students to the legislature for a tour and watch parts of a session in both houses. The field trip enhances their understanding of the process and shows them the professionalism and solemn tradition of the legislature.

Urban High School Teacher: In my government class, I have had two different projects that I felt have really made an impact on teaching students how to be involved in a government capacity in the future. The first project that I do is a bill-writing project. Students are assigned to a committee and write bills that pertain to them. Students then challenge these bills similar to actual debates in Congress. (example: student presents a bill that requires businesses to provide a paid internship each year to students, debate: who pays the bill for the wages?) In the end, students create formal bills that we submit to a state legislator. Finally, I do a mock trial activity where students are assigned various roles. Last year, my students really went with this. They studied outside of class, met with lawyers about how to proceed, etc. We presented the mock trial and had a jury make the findings. That year, my yearbook read that because of that activity, she wanted to become a prosecutor and has chosen to go to Law School.

Suburban Middle School Teacher: Every year I have my student complete 1 hour of community service per term. We talk about how this serves our community as well as our country. We also talk about what is going on nationally and the challenges we face as a country and state.

These examples are just a small sample of the ways that teachers work to highlight the importance of civic and character education.

Promoting Partnerships

In addition, the USBE is committed to engaging in partnerships that promote civic processes. For example, 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. Over 4,000 students from across the state participate. Students showcase projects of historical research and many advanced in contests from the district level to a state competition. The top state entries advance 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. These funds have been coupled with an 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.

Mock trials and other simulations also have a strong presence in Utah schools. The USBE 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. More than 1,000 junior and senior high school students on 70 mock trial teams participated in the Mock Trial Program. Over 300 students participated in the “We the People” competitions.

CONCLUSION

The commitment to civics and character education is consistently supported by Utah teachers. The standards, curricular choices, and partnerships across the state continue to reinforce this commitment.

The lack of any standardized assessments in social studies do limit the amount of quantifiable data available regarding the full attainment of civics mastery, so our assessment of the level and saturation of civic and character education initiatives remain at the qualitative data level.