

Civic and Character Education in Utah Charter Schools 2018

Civic and character education are fundamental elements of the Utah public education system's core mission. Utah's legislature recognizes that the cultivation of a continuing understanding and appreciation of a constitutional republic and principles of representative democracy in Utah and the United States among succeeding generations of educated and responsible citizens is important to the nation and state. Though the primary responsibility for the education of children within the state resides with their parents, public education has the role to support and assist parents in fulfilling that responsibility. Utah charter schools fulfill a vital purpose in the preparation of future generations of informed and responsible citizens who are deeply attached to essential democratic values and institutions. Civic and character education begins in the kindergarten classroom and continues in every grade. Utah standards, approved by the Utah State Board of Education, are rich with concepts that support civic and character education, helping to develop the moral and intellectual growth of Utah students.

The State Charter School Board, and their staff, visit most charter schools annually and informally observe the civic and character education practices of the schools. Many thanks to Utah's charter schools, and over 78,000 students, for allowing us to visit and observe how this statutory responsibility of preparing students to be upright, productive, and well-informed participants in our compound constitutional republic is being implemented. It is with great pleasure that we share these observations with the Utah Commission on Civic and Character Education. We were most impressed with Utah charter schools which clearly incorporated civic and character education into all aspects of the school, rather than isolating it to the legislative session or social studies classes. Several charter schools are shining examples of teaching character education lessons in all classrooms, choosing related character-building themes for each month of the school year and having related activities to support the selected theme, displaying related student projects in the school building, empowering the student government, and requiring service learning for graduation. To keep this report succinct, only a few examples are described in this report.

Key facts for this report:

- 89 schools responded to the Google Form survey that asked detailed questions about how civic and character education is being implemented in their school.
- Of the 89 respondents: 76.4% participated in student government, 67.4% held special civic or character education assemblies, 49.4% had a partnership with an unspecified civic or service organization, 47.2% held after school service clubs, another 47.2% did Community of Caring (or other service learning), 24.7% held a "History Day," 19.1% held mock elections, 16.9% participated in the state's Boys and Girls club, 14.6% held mock trials, and 7.9% did We the People/Project Citizen.
- Schools reported ensuring civic and character education efforts are integrated into the school curriculum in the regular course of school work by various means, including: making it a part of required curriculum for teachers, incorporating supporting language into schools' mottos/missions, placing it in the teaching schedule before school starts,

instituting a character pledge after the pledge of allegiance, community service programs, daily morning meeting classes, assemblies, Second Step program, *7 Habits of Highly Effective People* by Stephen R. Covey, making it a part of their charter, etc.

- Concerning proven practices, survey respondents reported that: 93.3% offered classroom instruction, 82% employed a discussion of current events, 79.8% did service learning, another 79.8% offered extra-curricular activities that enabled their students to get involved with their school/community, 70.8% encouraged involvement in school government, and 51.7% employed simulations of democratic processes.

Some examples of schools providing civic and character education:

Terra Academy: has a full curriculum for k-12 in character education every day for 30 minutes, employing direct class instruction, requiring 40 hours of community service for 9-12 graders, student government, and participation in a democratic debate process.

Karl G. Maeser Preparatory Academy: in addition to participating in student government, Boys and Girls, after school service clubs, special assemblies, Community of Caring, mock elections, and mock trials—the school is instituting a Hope Week and Constitution Week. Their government and Socratic classes incorporate simulations and case studies on the democratic process, constitution, among various other simulations to turn students into good statesmen. A long list of mentoring opportunities is offered, and students take part in those opportunities every Friday after school. Many students volunteer at the Family Crisis Center, doing service projects around the community and scheduling holiday service opportunities, etc.

Reagan Academy: has a student council that instructs younger students each month in a lesson about the character trait of the month. They also produce and perform an assembly to the older students on the same topic. Nominations are made for the students that demonstrate the trait every day and awards are given at the assembly. Reagan Academy also holds an Annual Veterans Day Assembly, has a Hope Squad at the school that offers support to those that struggle with issues and are at-risk for suicide. Reagan Academy has a Hall of Heroes Wall that members of the school and local community are inducted into. Their governing board asks for a monitoring report on civic and character education, then votes on the school's effectiveness.

George Washington Academy: does a schoolwide community service day in the spring where they partner with the City of St. George to provide service for the surrounding community. They have a student government that meets after school to plan and design service projects for the school and community, and a counselor and a teacher that deliver a leader in me curriculum to the students through class visits and assemblies.