



CHARTER CONNECTION

February 2021

YOUR MONTHLY UPDATE FOR ALL THINGS CHARTER

Table of Contents

Director's Message

You've made it to February. A time to celebrate love, presidents, black history, and the Utah legislative session? Yes. Thankfully, USBE makes it easy for all of us all to keep tabs on the education related bills via their [tracking sheet](#). Thus far, there are many bills to keep an eye on. From HB 42 seeking to remove some of schools' reporting requirements, HB 81 seeking to add mental health as a valid reason for school absence, HB 93's proposed amendments to Youth Suicide Prevention Program, HB 105's add-on formula WPU changes for students with disabilities, and more. We will do our best to keep you updated via our communications/Directors' meetings, but we also think you should keep tabs on the [tracking sheet](#) to monitor these and other bills as they progress.

In other news, we now have three Portfolio Managers who are assigned to each of our schools as a resource and support. They will also be doing school comprehensive reviews (done at least once every 5 years). We will be sending out an email to introduce them to you.

— *Jennifer*

Director's Message

Spotlight

Dear Dr. Ed

Themes of the Month

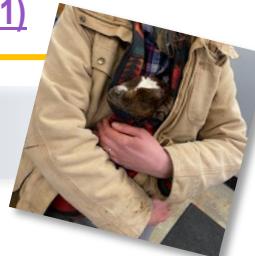
Opportunities for Schools

Outstanding in Our Field

February (2021)

March (2021)

SPOTLIGHT: ROOTS CHARTER HIGH SCHOOL



Roots Charter High School (RCH) is the only agriculturally focused high school in the state. Students here learn biology and other sciences through real-world, hands-on experiences in farming practices. Their math subjects focus on hands-on creation, where students use mathematical principles to solve problems they might experience. What makes this school so unique is its location. Tucked away inside of an industrial/commercial area near a freeway wouldn't seem to be the ideal location, but for the students they target this is exceptionally convenient. RCH primarily serves students who have been kicked out, or dropped out of every other option available. RCH takes the students which most other schools forget, and has given them a place and a purpose. Subsequently, the school has one of the highest retention rates in the state, meaning that students who gave up elsewhere stick with education here. This demographic also averaged 7-8 suicide attempts a year but brought that down to 0.

Roots Charter High School is exceptional in many ways, especially those just mentioned, but it is remarkable for another reason. It had exceptional student retention from last school year. By no means is that a small feat considering the challenges we've all enduring from the COVID-19 pandemic. With a 97% retention from last spring, Roots CHS is in the 98th percentile of SCSB-authorized schools. What makes this rate even more impressive is that the school was in the lowest 3% of school performance only a couple of years ago and was facing significant retention and transfer rate issues. School administrators and the governing board took advantage of USBE's turnaround program and became one of that program's success stories.

DEAR DR. ED

Dear Dr. Ed,

I, like everyone else, have poured my blood, sweat, and tears into this school year! I am exhausted. And now, the thought of starting our formal teacher evaluations on top of everything else is almost laughable. How can I make formal evaluations a positive and supportive experience as my teachers endure the challenge of day-to-day life as an educator in the era of Covid?

Sincerely,
Trying to Make it All Work

Dear Trying to Make it All Work,

While there are no perfect answers to our Covid questions, here is some guidance I have gathered from the field:

One admin suggested that the focus should be on encouraging teachers through positive feedback and focusing on what is working.

Another stated that “(We know) Education experts have already started examining the depths of the COVID-19 learning losses from the spring, which most agree shouldn’t be reflected on a teacher’s ability.”

These feelings are further echoed by those who see this as a much-needed opportunity. “Let’s work to make evaluations opportunities for growth. This is a change that was necessary before the pandemic and now we have an opportunity to do just that.”

One evaluation company suggests admins use teacher evaluations during Covid to determine:

1. What practices best support an organized virtual/hybrid/in-person classroom space?
2. How is the teacher supporting students socially and emotionally?
3. How is student participation is being encouraged?

Maybe above all we need to help our educators remember these simple truths: “Observations make us better. And each of us should be extremely understanding of the differences (in this year and years previous). But we are still teaching. Our kids are still learning.”

You’ve got this!

—*Dr. Ed U. Cation*

(adopted from: www.weareteachers.com)

THEME OF THE MONTH

As the pandemic began closing every element of society, one of the most rewarding things to see was how quickly and efficiently teachers created solutions to keep students progressing despite myriad possible barriers. In some cases, schools transformed overnight into online learning experts, and provided students with excellent lessons and learning activities. It will be a while before we see clear data about the impact the virus has had on education, but one thing will remain certain, teachers find solutions better than anyone!

This spirit of innovation is important in any classroom but is legally a part of what charters are supposed to do all the time. When the state began charters, they included the purpose to “encourage the use of different and innovative methods” (53G-5-104 (2)). Any elementary teacher will show you that the conjunction “and” is an important part of the stated purpose. It means that both of those traits have to work together. We do not want to do something different for the sake of being different. Neither is it innovation if a practice has already been shown to be ineffective, but we implement it with the hopes of a better outcome this year. Innovation is the creation, development and implementation of a new product, process, or service, with the aim of improving efficiency, effectiveness, or competitive advantage. Charters are meant to be different *and* innovative. The idea behind being different and innovative is that charters should be outperforming other schools—not because of the students they enroll, but because of the work the teachers and leaders are doing.

One specific example of innovation occurred recently at Roots Charter High School. Roots is the only agricultural charter school in the state (already an innovation). One night one of the goats gave birth, and when the teachers and students arrived the baby goat was struggling amid the snowy conditions. This team innovated quickly! They knew that if they did not do something different then the small goat would die. Within minutes the baby goat was cleaned and being warmed and monitored inside of a makeshift incubator.

Your students are often just like this baby goat. They come from diverse, and sometimes difficult circumstances which means that the status quo is not going to work. Let us remember that charter schools were started—and many of us joined them—because the state needed educational options to help every goat thrive. As you go into the second semester of what will certainly be remembered as a most chaotic school year, reflect on how you are innovating. Are you modus operandi, or are you actively challenging the status quo to find those new and innovative solutions to bring exceptional educational opportunities to each and every student?

OPPORTUNITIES FOR SCHOOLS

- Has your charter school governing board done its annual training on the Open and Public Meetings Act yet? The [Office of the State Auditor has a training for you](#)
- Pluralsight One, with USBE, is offering grant licenses to LEAs to provide course training for computer science, business, and technology. If interested, email amber.hellstrom@schools.utah.gov with the subject Pluralsight license, name of LEA, and emails of those needing license
- Work with an awesome charter school colleague at a SCSB authorized school? Nominate them for Employee of the Month at <https://forms.gle/dtEGG9EdnGkjHP7A>
- Looking for resources concerning the coronavirus?
<https://schools.utah.gov/coronavirus>
- Mentoring trainings are available at <https://www.utahscsb.org/mentoring>. Contact Marie.Steffensen@schools.utah.gov for more information.



OUTSTANDING IN OUR FIELD

- Congratulations to Dixie Montessori Academy Director Chelsea Bergeron for being recognized as January 2021's Employee of the Month of State Charter School Board Authorized Schools! Ms. Bergeron was hired one and a half years ago when DMA was struggling with internal conflict, Turnaround status, and low enrollment. In her first year, she successfully delivered the school out of Turnaround status and healed the culture of the school.
- Congratulations to Beehive Science & Technology Academy on their acceptance to the Diverse Charters Coalition, a national organization that promote the diversity in charter schools.
- Itineris Early College High School was ranked #33 (of 500) in [Newsweek's "Top STEM High Schools 2020" list](#).

February 2021

| Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | Saturday | Sunday |
|-------------------------|---------|-----------|--------------------|--------|----------|--------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| Director's Meeting 8 | 9 | 10 | SCSB Meeting 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 |
| 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 |
| 22 | 23 | 24 | 25 | 26 | 27 | 28 |
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March 2021

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| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| Director's Meeting 8 | 9 | 10 | SCSB Meeting 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 |
| 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 |
| 22 | 23 | 24 | 25 | 26 | 27 | 28 |
| 29 | 30 | 31 | | | | |