

Civic and Character Education Report

Program: Social Studies

October 1, 2012

Contact: Robert Austin, Education Specialist

Authorization:

53A-13-109

Purpose:

Civic and character education has been a cornerstone of public education since its inception in the United States. This civic and character education begins in the kindergarten classroom and continues in every grade. The social studies core curriculum, while not the sole source of civic and character education, is rich with concepts that support this civic and character education, developing the intellectual and moral growth of Utah students and preparing them to be productive, upright, and well-informed participants in our republic.

Implementation of Program/ Service Delivery/Activity Description:

Service Pattern:

Provide civic and character education through an integrated curriculum taught in connection with regular school work for all Utah K-12 students.

Legislative Funding:

Amount allocated for FY12: \$0.00

Performance Measures:

In an effort to assist school districts and charters in fulfilling the legislative mandate of an annual report on their civic and character education efforts, the USOE conducted a statewide survey in the fall of 2011 to learn more about current civic and character education practices.

The Utah Commission on Civic and Character Education will be conducting a similar statewide survey of civic and character education efforts this fall, with a statutory deadline of December 31, 2012. The USOE looks forward to working with the commission to learn from the survey data, identifying successes as well as opportunities for new initiatives.

Results:

While our survey focused on the self-reporting from schools, there are many partners across the state working to ensure that civic and character education is part of an integrated curriculum. Over 600 students tour the Utah courts every year as part of the outreach efforts of the Utah State Courts. The recent Constitution Day initiative by the Utah Bar, for example, had a goal of reaching 100 classrooms with judges and attorneys who could teach about the Constitution. Their efforts in this first year actually reached 193 classrooms in 15 counties across the state, with over 15,000 students reached on that one day alone.

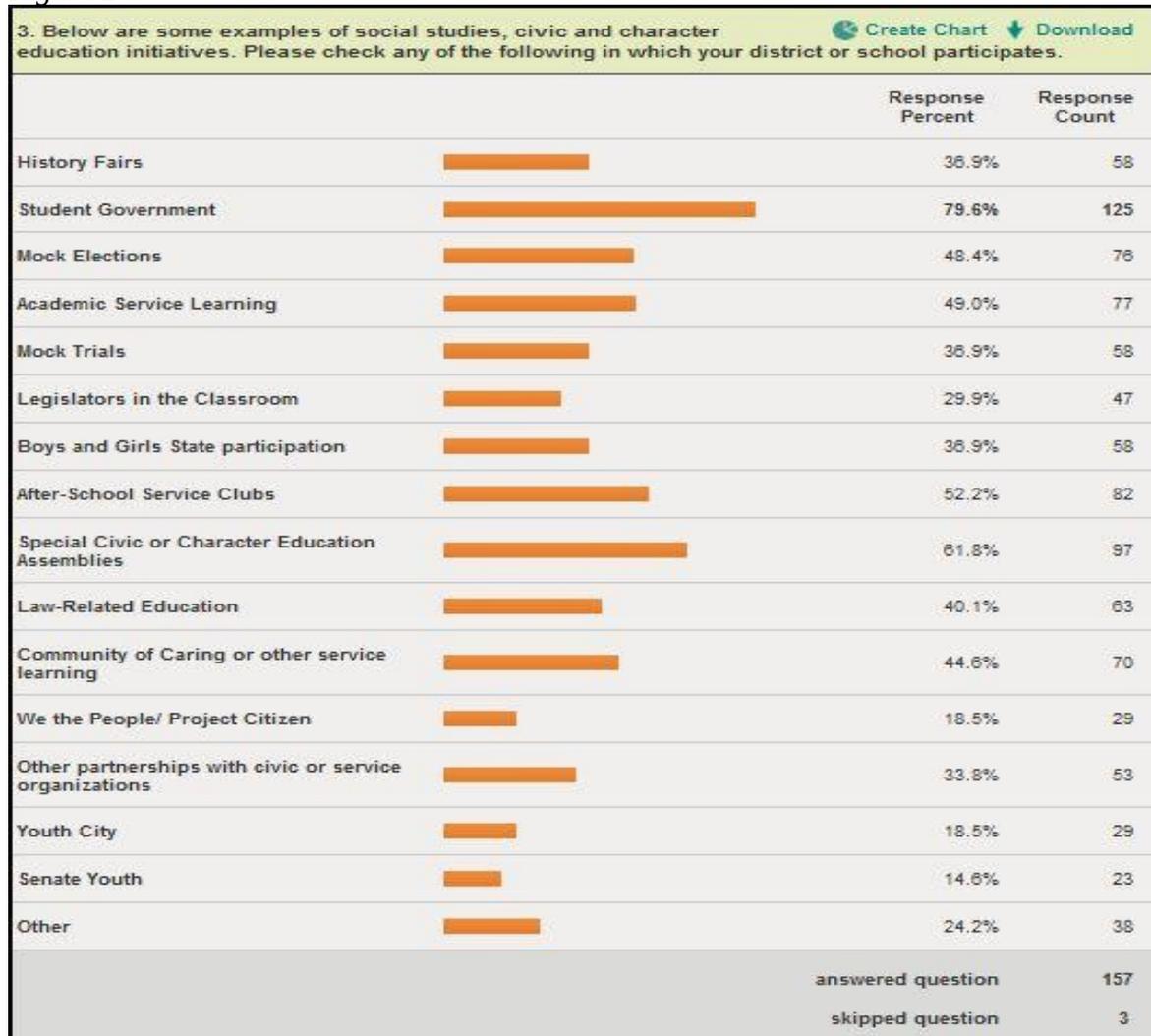
Finally, while the impact is only beginning to be realized, the new Utah Core Standards in English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects are already

having a significant and positive effect on social studies instruction in Utah. The focus on a much more expansive and inclusive term of literacy in all of its complexity -- including historical literacy, geographic literacy, economic literacy, and civic literacy -- is a welcome one. Teachers across the state are embracing the college and career-readiness standards that challenge Utah students with increased rigor and an emphasis on performance tasks. Over 300 Utah teachers engaged in prolonged professional development this summer to learn more about these new literacy expectations, and to develop strategies to put that learning into practice. Civic literacy, and civic action, will be directly and positively affected by this renewed emphasis found in the new Utah Core Standards.

The survey itself asked ten questions. All 41 school districts and 36 charter schools from across the state responded. The first two questions asked for demographic data. Question number three specifically focused on existing practices. These practices were listed since they are unique to Utah, or identified as practices that have a significant impact on civic and character education. Please see *Figure 1* for a summary of their responses.

As we move forward it will be important to focus on both the quality of the programs that are widely used as well as on the diffusion of programs that are available but not as widely incorporated as we would like. The USOE intends to follow up with additional questions for respondents regarding what can be done to eliminate obstacles to participation.

Figure 1



Question 4 allowed participants to elaborate on their answer to question number three, and Question four asked for elaboration on their responses to question number three. The question read “Please elaborate on any of the selections you made, and tell us about any social studies, civic and character education initiatives not on the list. “ Districts and charters self-reported a range of activities that supported these efforts, including focusing literacy programs on important documents from the founding of the nation, supporting veterans, holding character assemblies, and participating in academic service learning.

Question 5 asked for examples of ways they ensured that civic and character education efforts were integrated into the school curriculum in the regular course of school work. There were 176 responses, with a wide variety of examples of integration. Letter-writing to elected officials, school-wide community of caring efforts, community service, and incentives programs for good behavior were just some of the examples.

Question 6 focused on six proven practices that can help constitute a well-rounded and high quality civic learning experience. Of the 175 responses to this question, schools reported that in the majority of cases, each of the practices were occurring in their setting. (Figure 2). However, service learning and simulations of democratic process and practices, e.g. mock trials, mock elections, and simulated congressional hearings, were not occurring with as much frequency as the other four.



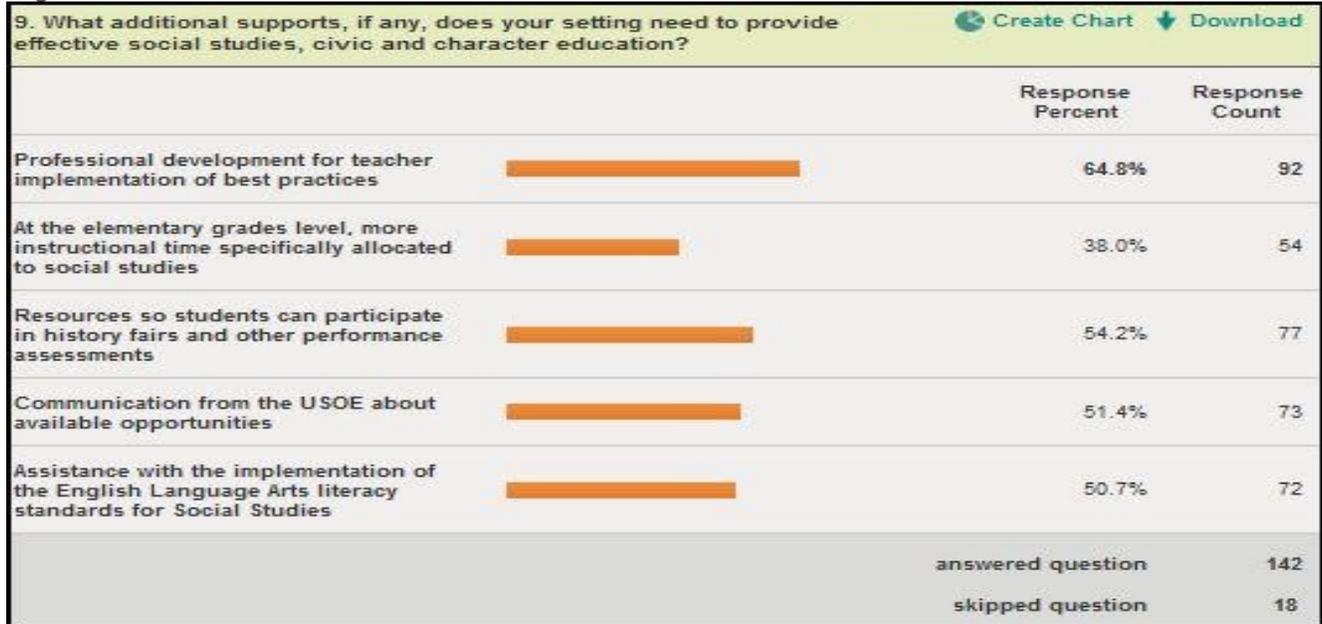
Question 7 allowed respondents to elaborate on their previous response. There were 104 respondents who elaborated on these six practices. The range and variety of ways Utah schools had embraced civic education was impressive. Again, schools have found both classroom-specific and school-wide strategies to address the goal of civic education.

176 survey participants responded to question eight: “How do you assess the effectiveness of social studies, civic and character education in your setting? Please tell us about traditional assessments, incentives, awards programs, or any other ways in which you gauge the impact of social studies in your setting.” Assessments included both formative and summative assessments of student learning, and included traditional assessments of content knowledge. In addition, assessment of civic and character education included gauging student participation in service, parent and student surveys, as well as by gauging overall student achievement, with civic and character education seen as inextricably linked to student success.

Question nine asked for any additional supports, if any, that their setting needed in order to provide effective social studies, civic and character education. Respondents were asked to respond to five specific choices, and the need for professional development for teachers was the number one choice by far, with additional resources so students can participate in performance assessments such as history fairs as the second choice

(Figure 3).

Figure 3



The final question for the survey asked “Please elaborate on any of the supports you selected, or tell us of any additional supports your setting could use.” 92 survey participants responded to this question. Overall, general themes included a desire for more support of elementary social studies, more professional development support so teachers can better implement civic and character education, and a wider geographic dispersal of professional development.

We thank the Utah Legislature and the Utah Commission on Civic and Character Education for their interest and support of civic and character education efforts in Utah. It is clear that there is much that is happening in the state’s classrooms, but also clear that there are opportunities for support and improvement. Support in best practices for teachers, creating effective performance assessments, providing on-line professional development courses, and encouraging more elementary social studies instruction are just some of the initiatives we have undertaken at the USOE, and as we glean more data from the survey results, this data will further instruct and inform our work.