



America's Legislators Back to School in Utah

Bringing Civics to Life

BACKGROUND and BACKBONE

Why a Legislators Back to School Program?

Legislators Back to School is a year round civic education program designed to help students understand the pressures and conflicts that legislators face, and to help legislators understand issues that affect students' lives. To meet these objectives, legislators engage students in meaningful discussions, mock sessions or simulated public hearings, or draft bills together while emphasizing civic responsibilities and preparing students to be educated voters and future leaders.

Because of the growing distrust in government and decline in voting among young voters across the nation over the years, a civic education initiative was launched just over a decade ago and Congress passed a bill that earmarked millions for a civic education project, Representative Democracy in America. Funded by the U.S. Department of Education by act of Congress, monies were shared in past years by project partners, National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), Center for Civic Education, and Center on Congress at Indiana University.

Money funded to NCSL went directly to the Trust for Representative Democracy and funded the supplemental materials that are available to legislators who participate in America's Legislators Back to School Program. First established in 1999 as America's Legislators Back to School Week, a pilot program with only several states invited to participate, Utah joined in when the program spread nationwide in 2000. Five years later, the week-long event turned into a year-round program to provide scheduling flexibility to all state legislatures, individual legislators, and schools.

How does Utah rank?

2011-2012

Utah ranked #1 in the nation with 96 percent legislator participation (100 legislators).

2010-2011

Utah ranked #1 in the nation with 90 percent legislator participation (94 legislators).

2009-2010

Utah ranked #1 in the nation with 91 percent legislator participation (95 legislators).

2008-2009

Utah ranked #1 in the nation again with 94 percent legislator participation (98 legislators).

2007-2008

Utah ranked #2 in the nation with 88 percent legislator participation (92 legislators).

2006-2007

Utah ranked #2 in the nation with 80 percent legislator participation (83 legislators). Massachusetts reported 100% participation, a first for any state to accomplish since the program's inception.

2005-2006

Utah ranked #1 in the nation as legislator participation climbed to 81 percent, and participating students climbed to 18,210 in 220 schools.

2004

Utah remained in the top three nationwide; 74 percent of the Legislature participated (*State Legislatures* July/August 2005). Legislators reached even more students than the previous year climbing to approximately 17,200 in 200 schools.

2003

Utah ranked #2 in the nation; 68 percent of the Legislature participated (*State Legislatures* January 2004). Legislators reached approximately 16,500 students in 165 schools.

2002

Utah ranked #1 in the nation in 2002; 92 percent of the Legislature participated (*State Legislatures* March 2003). Legislators reached approximately 9,000 students in 90 Utah schools in 2002. Legislators, judges, and attorneys joined together in the Dialogue on Freedom program that was initiated by the Utah State Bar to benefit students following the tragic events of 9-11.

How does Utah encourage participation?

The Utah State Legislature has passed concurrent resolutions urging schools and legislators to participate in this civics education program for the past five years. A concurrent resolution, by definition, expresses the position of the state on a specific matter and has the support of the governor.

- 2008 - SCR 2, Resolution Promoting Legislators Back to School Program (*Sen. Margaret Dayton*)
- 2007 - SCR 2, Resolution Promoting Utah's Legislators Back to School Program (*Sen. Margaret Dayton*)
- 2006 - HCR 2, Resolution Promoting Utah's Legislators Back to School Program (*Rep. Margaret Dayton*)
- 2005 - HCR 6, Resolution Recognizing Utah's Legislators Back to School Program (*Rep. Margaret Dayton*)
- 2004 - HCR 7, Resolution Recognizing Legislators Back to School Week (*Rep. Kory Holdaway*)
- 2003 - SCR 3, Resolution Designating Legislators Back to School Week (*Sen. Howard Stephenson*)

In addition, letters from legislative leadership inviting district superintendents to encourage their principals to welcome legislators into their schools, letters to individual principals and teachers from the program's coordinator, news releases and media coverage throughout the state, individual legislators contacting schools within their own districts, and the Utah State Legislature's Back to School website that explains 1) how to prepare students for a meaningful experience with a legislator, and 2) how to schedule classroom visits with a legislator.

Helpful Websites

Utah State Legislature Back to School - <http://www.le.utah.gov/lrgc/backtoschool.htm>

Lesson Plans K-12 - <http://www.ncsl.org/public/trust/lessonplans.htm>

State Stats: Top Ten Legislature Participation - <http://www.ncsl.org/public/trust/topten.htm> **Note:** 2003 statistics in *State Legislatures* January 2004 should reflect the Utah State Legislature participation at 68 percent, and NCSL's 2012 statistics at 96 percent as reported to NCSL.