

Pathways to Civic Character

A SHARED VISION FOR AMERICA'S SCHOOLS

At the heart of our shared vision for excellence in education is an abiding commitment to high academic achievement, civic and social responsibility, healthy social and emotional development and moral character for all students. In order to sustain and expand the American experiment in liberty and justice, students must acquire civic character — the knowledge, skills, virtues and commitment necessary for engaged and responsible citizenship. Civic character is responsible moral action that serves the common good.

The term “civic character” links the mutual goals that are being addressed by current efforts in civic education, character education, service-learning, and social and emotional learning. These and other similar initiatives seek to help schools educate for engaged citizenship in a democracy. However, all too often these initiatives are implemented in ways that are disconnected from one another or even seen as competing for time and attention. A lack of integration or sense of competition can result in confusion, lower levels of achievement, lack of attention to key goals, and, in some cases, paralysis — preventing schools from articulating and realizing a comprehensive civic and academic mission. In contrast, coordinating these efforts can lead to more cohesive educational programs with positive academic, social and emotional, health and citizenship results for students.

There are examples of individual districts, schools and teachers that successfully educate for civic character by integrating these initiatives across the curriculum and throughout the school culture. The aim is to graduate students of good character who are intellectually prepared, civically engaged, and compassionate members of the community.

Among other qualities, these are young people who:

- Value and demonstrate honesty, personal integrity and respect for others;
- Understand and effectively manage their emotions and behavior;
- Act toward others with empathy and caring;
- Resolve differences in constructive ways;
- Understand how to participate in the political process and democratic institutions that shape public policy;
- Exercise leadership for social justice;
- Work to counter prejudice and discrimination;
- Think critically and creatively about local issues, state and national affairs, and world events;
- Contribute time and resources to building community and solving problems.

A nation committed to democratic freedom requires citizens with the knowledge, skills, virtues and commitment needed for active engagement in public life. Schools, families, and communities can coordinate efforts to educate students who are responsible and caring citizens who act to build safe, just, and free societies locally, nationally, and internationally.

We invite those who care about civic character, leaders throughout education and those in the fields of civic education, character education, social and emotional learning, and service-learning to join us in affirming this shared vision for the civic and academic mission of schools. At this critical moment in our nation's history, we commit to work together to prepare young people for constructive, engaged citizenship vital to the future of democracy, freedom and the common good.

SIGNATORIES

Academy for Educational Development (AED)
American Association of School Administrators
American School Counselor Association
American Youth Policy Forum
Association for Supervision and Curriculum
Development (ASCD)
Center for Social and Emotional Education
Character Education Partnership

Collaborative for Academic, Social,
& Emotional Learning (CASEL)
Constitutional Rights Foundation
Council of Chief State School Officers
Educators for Social Responsibility
First Amendment Center
National and Community Service Coalition
National Association of Elementary
School Principals

National Association of Secondary
School Principals
National Association of State Boards of Education
National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS)
National School Boards Association
State Education Service Learning Network (C-Net)
Street Law