

Autumn Message from Chief Justice Christine M. Durham, Utah Supreme Court, and Chair of the Utah Coalition for Civic, Character and Service Learning

A national report released May 16th revealed that American students are not being taught what it means to be a citizen in a democracy. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) released the findings of the 2006 'Nation's Report Card' on U.S. History and Civics during a press conference in May at the Old State House in Boston, Massachusetts. ('The Nation's Report Card on Civics' is the most authoritative measure available on how well schools are preparing students for active citizenship.)

This finding has real implications for the future of our constitutional democracy, which rests on how civically literate and engaged our citizens are, and we should all be concerned.

"America's school children are woefully unprepared to take their place as informed, engaged citizens," said Charles N. Quigley, executive director of the Center for Civic Education, in response to the release of 'The Nation's Report Card.' "The fact that only a little over 24% (aggregate of three grade levels) of students tested were able to achieve a proficient score on this important national measure is hardly surprising given the narrowing of the curriculum and testing that focuses on a few subjects to the exclusion of all others," Quigley said. "The Nation's Report Card: Civics 2006" showed that only 24 percent of fourth-graders, 22 percent of eighth-graders and 27 percent of twelfth-graders could reach a simple mastery of civics called proficient." Quigley added: "Our system of public education was founded with the twin goals of preparing each generation for the workplace and active citizenship. Today's report demonstrates we have lost sight of educating the citizen in favor of concentrating on preparing the worker."

But we don't have to do one at the expense of the other. We can do both, and our young people and our nation will be better off because of it. We can educate for academic achievement, for the workplace, and for citizenship.

Our founders pressed for a system of common schools to foster citizens capable of sustaining this fragile new experiment in liberty--citizens with civic knowledge, citizens who participated, and citizens with good character. The twin goals of education in the United States have historically been academic and citizenship development, and public schools were founded to foster these important goals. The civic mission of schools must be restored, revitalized, and

strengthened. This is vitally important to the future of our state, and of our nation.

Our nation is falling short in teaching the values, principles and ideals that underlie our representative democracy. Our students must understand our political and cultural traditions, and have the knowledge, skills, qualities and habits to participate as engaged citizens in the affairs of our nation. We can do this by teaching civic education, character education and service learning in our schools. Education must develop the student and the worker, but it must also develop the citizen and the human being. A complete education includes educating for both academics and citizenship. Citizenship is the "other side of the report card," and public schools were created to be the basic institution in our nation charged with passing on our vision of a constitutional democracy.

As a result of much work by many committed individuals and organizations in our state, and four years of Congressional Conferences, much has been accomplished. These national conferences succeeded in re-kindling commitment all across the nation in focusing on the important civic mission of schools. These conferences were attended by state lawmakers, education and community leaders, and always included a strong delegation from Utah.

For example, state coalitions dedicated to strengthening civic education policies and practice and restore the civic mission of schools are sprouting up all across the nation, and are making great progress. Also:

- Every state has established a campaign coalition to strengthen civic education**
- Thirteen states, including Utah, have created officially sanctioned state commissions on civic education or civic literacy**
- Thirty measures supporting effective civic learning have passed legislatures in 23 states, including Utah**
- Twenty-six states have held state level summit conferences on the importance of effective civic education**

But much remains to be done. In Utah, we have created legislation supporting schools in re-connecting with their basic civic mission, and in building character. We have created a state Commission for Civic and Character Education, and a Coalition for Civic, Character and Service Learning, to provide leadership for the state's commitment to civic and character education

in the public schools, institutions of higher education, and the larger community.

- **It's exciting to know that these initiatives enjoy support from the highest levels of leadership across all three branches of state government, and are a bi-partisan effort as well.**
- **The work of the Commission, in partnership with the Coalition, is to create a network of organizations, agencies, and universities committed to helping schools K-16 in accomplishing their basic civic mission.**
- **The Coalition will be a clearinghouse of information and resources on civic education, character education and service learning.**
- **It is a provider of high quality staff development events and activities for teachers in the classroom, and pre-service teachers preparing for the classroom.**

I invite you to join this statewide initiative leading the charge in a Call to Action for Civic Engagement, Civic and Character Education and Service Learning in our schools and communities.

Sincerely,

**Christine M. Durham
Chair, Utah Coalition for Civic, Character and Service Learning**