FLY FiVE ®

The Social and Emotional Learning Curriculum

CIVIC RESPONSIBILITY FOR STUDENTS

Civic responsibility has consistently been a part of education in the United States, and it is often integrated into academic coursework with a focus on understanding democratic institutions while promoting the skills and behaviors necessary to participate meaningfully in civic life (Wilcox, 2011). A working definition of civic responsibility is the "active participation in the public life of a community in an informed, committed, and constructive manner, with a focus on the common good" (Gottlieb & Robinson, 2006, 16). Civic responsibility is crucial not only to build students' competence in responsibility, but also to ensure that they become contributing members of civil society.

The Impact of Civic Responsibility and Engagement

Civic engagement can increase the acquisition of skills like writing and critical thinking, help students understand how academic knowledge can be useful in addressing community needs, and improve graduation rates among K–12 students (Cress, 2012). Aspects of civic responsibility, such as partnering with the community, promoting respectful relationships among teachers, students, staff, and community members, and seeing diversity and adversity as strengths, are associated with higher academic performance (Wilcox, 2011).

Civic responsibility entails building skills across intellectual, participatory, research, and persuasion competencies. These skills include critically analyzing solutions to problems and their implications, building coalitions and influencing policies, tracking issues and using the media in a constructive way, and developing a rationale to support an opinion (Gottlieb & Robinson, 2006). All of these skills are essential for students' academic, social, and emotional growth and are related to increased academic engagement and more positive life outcomes (Cress, 2012).

Fostering Civic Responsibility

Civic responsibility requires that individuals are engaged both mentally and physically in shaping the nature of their society; this doesn't simply happen, educational institutions are tasked with adequately preparing students for active, meaningful civic engagement (Larson-Keagy, n.d.). To start students on a path toward developing civic responsibility, teachers can highlight how civic responsibility contributes to a well-functioning society. In this society, members are tolerant, dedicated to the common good, supportive of others, and able to engage meaningfully with their government (Callaway, 2018). Teachers can also discuss with students the various, tangible ways to be civically responsible, including (Gottlieb & Robinson, 2006):

- Critically engaging with laws and rules that govern a school and community
- Embracing participatory democracy through actions like voting in all elections
- Understanding how to influence policies and make one's voice heard

Encourage students to reflect on what civic responsibility means to them using the following prompts (Gottlieb & Robinson, 2006; Callaway, 2018):

- What is your experience with civic responsibility and engagement? How has civic responsibility, such as community service or involvement in community groups, impacted you?
- What attitudes, practices, policies, and collective values do you want to see in your school, community, and society at large?
- What skills and perspectives must you cultivate in order to function well in your civic role?
- What do you imagine your civic responsibilities to be?

Civic responsibility creates supportive, tolerant communities bound together by respectful and engaged citizens. Schools can ensure that students not only understand what civic responsibility is, but also the necessary actions to engage constructively and responsibly in their school and community. In doing so, schools and students work together to build stronger communities in the present and for the future.

References

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