

## **UPF International: Democracy Depends on Civic Mindedness - Parents Can Make a Difference**

Lynn Walsh  
November 17, 2022

UPF-International - Many UN consensus documents underline the importance of productive civic engagement for successful communities and governments. Unfortunately, heated political sentiments and contentious debates are prevalent today, often discouraging or impeding effective citizen participation. In addition, it has become evident that fewer younger US citizens are being taught their civic responsibilities or the value of democracy. To address this concern, the NGO Committee on the Family, NY of which UPF is an executive member, held a webinar titled "Civic Responsibility: What Your Children Need to Know" on November 17, 2022.

Professor Paul Caresse, Founder and Director of the School of Civics and Economic Thought and Leadership at Arizona State University, referred to a recent survey in the US indicating that only 30% of the Millennials think that democracy is very essential compared to the 72% of those born before World War II. Schools in the US have less civic education and nine states have no civic education requirements. Prof. Caresse quoted President Lincoln as saying before the Civil War: "Civic ignorance is a breeding ground for political violence and national suicide." He described the program Educating for American Democracy (EAD) which emphasizes an honest, plural and shared story of America, both the good and the bad. EAD cultivates civic honesty and reflective patriotism by integrating history and civics and encouraging inquiry into the context and whys in history and democracy. The objectives of EAD are to help students gain a balanced sense of agency in relation to society and the world; to manage civil disagreement and civic friendship; and pursue civic action that is authentic, responsible and informed. Prof. Caresse stated that parents are key for encouraging civic learning and reinforcing this through active citizenship at home and in their community. He encouraged the audience, especially parents and teachers, to learn more about the EAD program at [www.educatingforamericandemocracy.org/](http://www.educatingforamericandemocracy.org/)

Mrs. Tammy Waller, Director of State Professional Programs, described their program, iCivics, which is a non-profit civic education provider of high-quality, non-partisan, engaging, and free resources to more than 9 million students annually, in all 50 states. It was founded by Justice Sandra Day O'Connor in 2009 to "ensure that all Americans have the knowledge and will to participate in our unique experiment in self-government." The program provides numerous creative games and resources through their digital civic library that easily engage children and can be used at home by parents. Mrs. Waller expressed alarm about how poorly American youth today understand and trust the American constitutional democratic processes and institution. Civic education she said is essential for keeping our democracy. Mrs. Waller gave many examples of how parents can teach their children civics. She encouraged parents to discuss news and current issues with their children, being sure to encourage their critical thinking about democracy and responsible citizenship. She recommended that all parents take their children with them every time they vote and make it an important day.

One point brought up in the question-and-answer period was that China mandates a heavy load of civic education for all children and all of its people. This brought to light a very troubling contrast between China and the US and other democracies. This is because the very nature and success of democracy depends on informed, honest, questioning, responsible and contributing citizenry. Lincoln knew that democracy will crumble without educated and engaged citizens. All of this does not come without good civic education and a socially conscientious environment. The actions of diligent and well-equipped parents can make a huge difference in turning this around.

# CIVIC RESPONSIBILITY: WHAT YOUR CHILDREN NEED TO KNOW



**Paul Caresse**

Founder and Director

The School of Civics and Economic Thought  
and Leadership, Arizona State University



**Tammy Waller**

Director

State Professional Programs  
iCivics

A variety of United Nations consensus documents have established the importance of civic engagement and the Civics Education that necessarily proceeds that engagement. Civics education contributes to vibrant and successful communities and inspires the next generation to be active, productive, and engaged citizens. It helps young people make meaning of current events and reassures them that nationally and internationally, there is precedent for solving modern challenges. Teaching civics allows students to learn valuable skills that are conducive to critical thinking. It helps students understand how important decisions have shaped their country. At its root, civics education is about teaching diverse groups of people how to live together well.

**THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 17**  
1:15-2:30 pm EST  
ONLINE VIA ZOOM

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