



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
September 9, 2024
www.sde.idaho.gov

Media Contact:
Maggie T. Reynolds
Public Information Officer
208-332-6976
mreynolds@sde.idaho.gov

Critchfield: Let's Talk Government, Civics and the U.S. Constitution in Schools this September 17

From Superintendent of Public Instruction Debbie Critchfield

(BOISE) - Constitution and Citizenship Day mark the month of September, and for kids in public schools, it's an opportunity to emphasize the foundation of citizenship: the Constitution. I'm inviting all Idaho teachers to set aside 10 minutes at the beginning of class on September 17th to talk about the U.S. Constitution.

The goal is to give students of all ages and grades the opportunity to understand and appreciate the significance of the world's longest-surviving written charter of government and how it protects individual rights. We want our students to know the stories and details about its creation and the individuals involved. We see national data that shows most Americans can't answer questions about who the Father of the Constitution is, or the term length of members of Congress. I believe we can do better here in Idaho.

Many times, the purpose of government and how it all came to pass is lost amongst all the information shared with students. Asking our teachers to take a few minutes to honor the day of the Constitution's signing by calling attention to the document and its exceptional principles is a great use of class time.

For students, something as basic as the first three words – "We The People" – affirm that government power is with the people, and in a constitutional democratic republic, we exercise and delegate our power through elected officials. That is information we don't want lost in the shuffle of learning.

The U.S. Constitution offers a framework for each of us to be governed by laws and not by individuals. And it states that each state can regulate and oversee their own state's laws, including the education of its residents. And I care about that! Added to that, the Bill of Rights provides us personal protections against the infringement of government. The Constitution is a

document that we must uphold, and we do that when we are informed and active citizens. We also do that when we learn and are knowledgeable about our civic responsibilities. And for me personally, though my job is defined in state law, our national Constitution underpins many of my responsibilities.

Article IX of the Idaho Constitution clearly outlines the objective of education by stating that, “the stability of a republican form of government depending mainly upon the intelligence of the people, it shall be the duty of the legislature of Idaho, to establish and maintain a general, uniform and thorough system of public, free common schools.”

With respect for all the components of the Idaho Constitution, this is my personal favorite! Our country depends upon an educated citizenry, and students who know and understand the purpose and function of our Constitution will be prepared to participate in our democratic activities, ready to protect our important values and stand with our Founding Fathers who understood that our form of self-government requires informed participation.

At the conclusion of the Constitutional Convention, Benjamin Franklin was asked what form of government had been established. Famously, he replied, “ A Republic, if you can keep it.”

###