



[DRAFT] Guiding Principles - Social Studies Standards
Updated: November 20, 2020

Preamble

The D.C. Social Studies Standards must contain content that equips all students with the foundational historical knowledge—of chronology, pivotal events, leading figures, and seminal documents—that “well-educated American students” ought to know and be able to incorporate into their discourse and argument. The current D.C. standards have been highly regarded for their clarity about such content and, thus, the D.C. State Board of Education (SBOE) and its Social Studies Standards Advisory Committee (SSSAC) recommend that the current standards be revised rather than wholly re-written.

However, there is a need for significant revisions to update the standards.

The revised D.C. Social Studies Standards must recognize that the world our students are growing up in is—more than ever before—globally interconnected and culturally diverse. District students need the knowledge, skills, experiences, and mindsets that will prepare them for informed and engaged citizenship and careers in this globalized world. Students should be prepared and empowered to think of themselves as actors on a global stage.

The revised D.C. Social Studies Standards must move beyond a “heroes and holidays” treatment of history content, instead building clear threads of knowledge which grow in complexity throughout the Pre-K–12 standards. In calling for the revision of social studies standards, among the specific issues that the State Board noted was the need for revised standards to be “culturally inclusive and anti-racist, impart important social studies content in the early grades, strengthen student knowledge of democratic principles and values, and promote civic engagement.”

It is also essential that the revised standards provide a manageable number of clear, high-level content and skills standards, as well as opportunities for teachers to impart these standards of knowledge in flexible ways that suit the educational approaches of their schools and courses (i.e., project-based learning, Montessori education, etc.). In making revisions, the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) should ensure that skills are just as core a part of social studies as content.

The revised standards should facilitate the creation of standards-aligned real-world experiences as part of social studies curriculum. No District student should graduate without authentic interracial, intercultural, international exchange and experience.

Furthermore, OSSE should seek standards writers who reflect the demographics and experiences of the students of DC and of the communities they are writing about (e.g., seeking LGBTQ+ writers; ensuring inclusion of advocates for people with disabilities; teaching Black history through the words of Black people; giving agency to BIPOC rather than discussing only in relation to white people).

With all of the above in mind, it is essential that the revised DC Social Studies Standards incorporate the Guiding Principles listed below, beginning in Pre-K and developing deeper understanding through Grade 12, to focus and build student learning across grades on critical topics. The Guiding Principles listed below are all equally important and are not listed in any particular order of priority.





Guiding Principles

Structure and Content

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| 1 | <p><i>Fewer, clearer, higher: Ensure content standards are rigorous</i></p> <p>All standards should be rigorous and developmentally appropriate to the students' age/grade level.</p> <p>The standards should be written and organized in such a manner that promote student understanding of complex ideas and concepts rather than learning a long laundry list of facts, individuals, etc. This is of course not to say that factual information, individuals, etc. should not be included in the standards but their inclusion should serve to promote deep understanding of essential content, rather than surface level analysis.</p> <p>OSSE should consider whether there is a place in the social studies standards document for the concept of "major work of the grade" – which is how the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) and the writers of the Common Core mathematics standards went about focusing those voluminous standards.</p> |
| 2 | <p><i>Content standards must be coherent, developmentally appropriate and vertically aligned across grade levels Pre-K–12</i></p> <p>Social studies is an inquiry-based discipline. Standards should work together to create coherent courses that minimize repetition of content over multiple years and maximize learning connections across grade levels.</p> <p>To this end, the content of K–5 needs to be dramatically reassessed. It is currently low-level, vague, and repetitive. We should not underestimate the ability of young children to understand complex and difficult topics. Young students deserve cognitively demanding, interesting content that lays the groundwork for self-identity and a critical awareness of the world.</p> |
| 4 | <p><i>Ensure comprehensive coverage of human rights principles in standards Pre-K–12</i></p> <p>Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law principles and institutions should be incorporated throughout Pre-K–12 standards in line with the National Council for the Social Studies position statement Human Rights Education: A Necessity for Effective Social and Civic Learning. This should include the fact that rights also come with responsibilities, that human rights violations occur internationally and in the US, and can be the result of intentional actions and inaction.</p> <p>The current DC Social Studies Curriculum Standards mention "human rights" four times—all in high school standards in grades 10–12. This is valuable; however, human rights concepts should be integrated throughout Pre-K–12.</p> |
| 6 | <p><i>Use of Active Voice and Action Verbs in Revised Standards</i></p> |





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| | <p>The DC Social Studies Standards should use active voice and precise language to ensure that actions in history are attributed to specific actors. The current standards employ passive voice in a number of places, especially around acts of white supremacy. Additionally, action verbs, including the high level verbs of Bloom’s Taxonomy, should be incorporated wherever possible. Specifically, higher level action verbs regarding creation and adjudication are important to include if we are to draft standards that are actively anti-racist. Students need to have practice imagining and designing a more just society if social studies courses are to fulfill this mission.</p> |
| <p>OQ1</p> | <p><i>Arranging Skills and Content Standards to Ensure Adequate Attention to Both</i></p> <p>In the current DC standards, the content standards are arranged by grade-level and the skill’s standards are assigned by grade band. The separation of content and skills standards is an intelligent way of ensuring that the two don’t become conflated, but both deserve adequate attention in the revised standards.</p> <p>Teachers find it helpful to have grade level bands as guidance and having skills in bands feels appropriate for developmental pathways across Pre-K–12. Organizing skills by anchor standard (a la CCSS/C3 Framework), consistently across all grade bands can help with vertical alignment and usefulness. However, formatting is essential to keep skills visible in the standards and at the forefront for curriculum planning. Skills standards might, for instance, be included at the top of each grade-level set of content standards.</p> <p>Skills content should be integrated alongside content themes, and throughout the Pre-K–12 standards.</p> |

Knowledge and Skills

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| <p>7</p> | <p><i>Knowledge Framing: Anti-Racist</i></p> <p>There are very few areas in the current standards where it is clear to see the intersectionality of justice movements. Rather, the standards offer “this or that” framing, which is rooted in racist thinking.</p> <p>Creating more complex statements in the standards will allow for students to explore the intersections of our lives and how as people we can interact with our government in all of those identities. Incorporating an explicit, ongoing thread on the history of African-Americans, including their treatment by society and our legal system and their role in and impact on US history, including on the growth and evolution of legal equality and democratic rights and the creation of a multicultural, democratic society (e.g., substantial treatment of slavery, Jim Crow, Civil Rights movement, Reconstruction, treatment that propelled the Great Migration, how that mass migration shaped the future of American cities, Redlining, discrimination in voting rights, segregation in education, resistance and collective social action, etc.) would facilitate this shift. Additional threads on the history of indigenous peoples and other communities of color should also be incorporated in the revised standards.</p> |
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| | <p>Courses would benefit from starting out with some identity standards and using culturally relevant and current spaces to build community. Revised standards should also clearly center resistance by, not merely oppression of marginalized groups of people in history.</p> |
| 8 | <p><i>Knowledge Framing: Power & Bias</i></p> <p>Students should be grappling with the concepts of power and bias throughout Pre-K–12. Especially from a historiographic standpoint. Students should be thinking about who produces the primary and secondary sources they consume to learn history, what their relationship to power is, what bias this might create, and what this means about what is left out or over-emphasized.</p> <p>Incorporating an explicit, ongoing thread on the continuing tension in American history between the promise of democracy and equality in the founding documents and the reality of inequality; about how these principles and human rights have evolved in the US over time, including an emphasis on how they have been propelled by various social movements and, especially, by the stop-and-go efforts over time to repair the initial sin of slavery and the subsequent unequal treatment of African-Americans and other groups that have not been centered; and the tension between US pressure on other nations to respect human rights, while the US is violating the rights of US citizens at home would facilitate this shift.</p> |
| 10 | <p><i>Environmental Literacy</i></p> <p>Environmental literacy needs to be part of Pre-K–12 standards, should touch on every time period, and be woven into the study of history, economics, geography and civics. The standards should ensure students develop skills to investigate the causes and consequences of society's impact on the environment and resolve challenges related to equitable access to natural resources.</p> <p>The standards on this topic should include discussion of: trade-offs between short-term costs and long-term benefits of sustainable practices; how geography determines how we live the impact of geography (which includes the study of topography, resources and climate) and people; the impact of environmental factors on human settlement and migration; related civic responsibilities (i.e., reduce, reuse, recycle) associated with environmental factors; global interdependence; role that access to and control of land and natural resources plays in conflict; the ways that economic policies have commodified natural resources and the consequences, etc.</p> |
| 11 | <p><i>Skill: Student Agency, Participation and Voice</i></p> <p>The revised standards should honor student agency and other authentic engagement opportunities centering student voice and participation. Standards should provide a framework for instructional dialogue that will provoke critical thinking. Furthermore, the standards should provide a framework from which teachers can link coursework with engagement in real-world problem-solving within local, national and international contexts through experiential learning by “doing” through service, project- and community-based learning. Skills standards should foster taking informed action, perhaps using language from the C3 framework.</p> |
| 12 | <p><i>Skill: Digital Literacy</i></p> |





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| | <p>Digital literacy must be explicitly included in the standards from Pre-K–12. Standards should include an understanding of the laws, rights, and responsibilities when we access and use the internet and technological development.</p> <p>Students should be empowered to be good digital citizens—both responsible consumers of online content and capable users of technology/online platforms for civic engagement and driving social change.</p> <p>Information on surveillance, privacy, what it means to share information on the internet, debates on disinformation/censorship, and the global movement to regulate technology companies to protect user/consumer rights should all be included in the standards. This example from Massachusetts is a helpful framework for digital literacy http://www.doe.mass.edu/frameworks/current.html.</p> |
| 13 | <p><i>Skill: Social Studies standards should include skills that complement the ELA standards</i></p> <p>In order to ensure coherence with other learning standards and a well-rounded education for students, the social studies standards should include the following skills:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Research• Evaluating information sources• Understanding context• Historical thinking• Persuasive writing• Discourse practices• Debate |
| 14 | <p><i>Knowledge Framing: Democratic citizenship, civic dispositions & experiences</i></p> <p>An effective social studies education includes knowledge, skills, and dispositions related to democratic citizenship.</p> <p>Civics includes two spheres of knowledge: 1) the mechanics of democratic citizenship that includes understanding and skills related to rights, responsibilities, local/national government, democratic process, forms of civic engagement, public discourse, and concepts of equality, justice, liberty, human and civil rights; and 2) dispositions or ways of being a democratic citizen that includes understanding and developing tolerance, respect, empathy, conflict resolution, and other social-emotional skills.</p> <p>The revised standards should incorporate an explicit, ongoing thread aimed at developing student understanding of key principles of democratic society (e.g., equality, checks and balances, first amendment, federalism, etc.), how and why this vision was so different from what had typically existed in the past, how it is different from other countries today, the fragility of these principles, how democratic societies have failed in the past, and the rights and responsibilities of citizens in a democratic society.</p> |





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| | Currently, some civic values standards come too late in the DC student education experience. These values need to be scaffolded, taught, and reinforced throughout Pre-K–12. Students should be given an opportunity to engage in civic experiences, not just learn about them in a textbook. |
| 24 | <p><i>Knowledge Framing: Global Perspective</i></p> <p>All social studies content should be embedded within a global context. The revised standards should include an explicit, ongoing thread that provides students with a global perspective and global context for their own lives, their history, and their society; that equips students with the content knowledge, skills, experiences, and mindsets that will help prepare them for careers and engaged citizenship in a culturally diverse and globally interconnected world; that explores not just comparisons but connections between peoples of the United States and the rest of the world, historically and in the present.</p> |

Diversity and Inclusion

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| 15 | <p><i>Recognition of currently under-represented groups</i></p> <p>The new social studies standards should include explicit attention to first-person accounts and recognition of people and groups that have been discriminated against throughout history.</p> <p>Groups, especially groups that are not white cis male, need to not be treated like monoliths. We are leaving out so many stories if we only tell those of women who are white, African-Americans who are heterosexual, or Latinos who are men. Intersectionality should be a key feature of the revised standards.</p> <p>The current standards emphasize the lives of presidents and other figures who held/hold power and under-represent or lack representation of the following people and groups, and their respective histories:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individuals with disabilities • LGBTQ+ • Latinx • “Regular people” / “Average people” • Indigenous people, especially after 1900 • Specific large immigrant groups in the DC metro (Ethiopian, Central American, Vietnamese) |
| 16 | <p><i>Incorporate District History in Pre-K–12</i></p> <p>The new social studies standards should be “home” for the District of Columbia, reflecting our city’s realities, opportunities, communities, cultures, and history, our unique legal status among cities, and our place as the center of power. This intentional focus should be taught throughout Pre-K–12.</p> <p>The District’s history should not be sequestered in a single course in high school; it should be taught throughout a student’s education.</p> |





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| 19 | <p><i>Orientation towards <u>“Hard History”</u> in both US and World History</i></p> <p>The new social studies standards should disrupt the notion of American/European/Western exceptionalism and centrism—and explicitly address the American exceptionalism narrative that is currently implicit in the existing standards.</p> <p>The revised standards should focus on teaching “Hard History” as both content and a set of civic skills. This shift requires moving away from heroification, while clearly addressing intersectionalities (i.e., class, gender, etc.) and various forms of institutional and structural violence, such as racism, white supremacy, antisemitism, classism and sexism, etc. As an example, Teaching Tolerance provides a “Hard History” framework for Teaching American Slavery at K–12 grade levels.</p> <p>The World History content must push away from a Euro-centric vision to one that is truly global. Rejecting Euro-centrism means rejecting contemporary understandings of Western culture as a normal starting point from which other cultures deviate and presenting holistic histories of different places around the world that do not begin or end with interaction with the West. Students should be required to learn and express the value of non-dominant (likely non-Western / Euro-centric) cultures that are different from their own.</p> |
| 20 | <p><i>Creating “Windows and Mirrors” for DC Students in the Standards</i></p> <p>The new social studies standards should ensure that the topics, themes, and people students study provide windows and mirrors in order to help students understand the world. The current standards have too many windows, and the mirrors that exist do not provide a wide enough range of experiences (or provide stereotypical or demeaning experiences). Intersectionality and diversity within groups is important.</p> <p>The DC Social Studies Standards should help students to form a sense of self identity, community identity, national identity, and global identity while helping students understand that the identities we assume are numerous and interactive. All students deserve to see themselves, their communities, and their heritage in the new social studies standards and as part of the “American story,” as well as distinct groups.</p> |

Instructional Flexibility and Equity

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| 22 | <p><i>Clarity & transparency in the “canon” included in the standards</i></p> <p>There are individuals and events that are critical for students to learn about and the new social studies standards should require specific people, events, general movements, topics, and themes.</p> <p>However, teachers (and curriculum authors) should have the flexibility to choose examples (i.e., people and events) to include within the general movements, topics, and themes. When specific people and events are listed in the new standards, it must be clear why each person and event was selected and that</p> |
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| | <p>specific examples are not prescriptive, but suggestive (e.g., In the Michigan K–12 Social Studies Standards, U4.3.1, the content standard is about the origins of the American education system and Benjamin Franklin, Benjamin Rush, Noah Webster, and Horace Mann are just four of the many examples that could be used when teaching the standard; the language “examples may include but are not limited to” is used and it is clear that these individuals were selected as they address a specific standard.)</p> <p>The new standards should recognize that different LEAs need some degree of flexibility to implement IB or other thematic curriculum that aligns with their mission.</p> |
| OQ2 | <p><i>Ensure specificity, clarity and labeling of disciplinary content & themes</i></p> <p>The current social studies standards are coded to indicate seven (7) areas of disciplinary content. The new standards should consider additional disciplinary content codes like sociology, anthropology, philosophy, religion/spirituality, and humanitarian action in addition to existing codes, like military/conflict.</p> <p>A new coding system must be usable and clear to ensure that LEAs can easily use the standards to create thematic curriculum. The goal of a coding system is to support thematic instruction and highlight where social science disciplines are included.</p> <p>The current parenthetical letters (i.e., geography (G)) are not helpful because there are too many codes and standards. One possible exemplar system is the AP US History framework, which uses its themes to organize standards within a content area. The revised coding system should better recognize the current shift to content-specific courses in high school from early grades.</p> |
| OQ3 | <p><i>Standards should align with student-centered, inquiry-based curriculum</i></p> <p>The C3 Framework uses an inquiry design model (IDM) as an instructional framework. The new social studies standards should keep inquiry at the center —using language that requires pushing students to inquire and ask compelling questions; construct, critique, and analyze arguments; and gather and source appropriate evidence. Consider using the language of the C3 Framework indicators to revise the Historical and Social Science Analysis Skills in the current standards.</p> |

