

Clarifying the Delaware State Social Studies Standards

Acknowledgements

Preface

Civics

Economics

Geography

History

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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PREFACE

This preface and the content standards clarifications which follow are adapted from work of the 1995 Social Studies Curriculum Framework Commission. The framework includes perspectives on how social studies curriculum should be planned, sequenced, integrated, and implemented in Delaware classrooms. Designing backward from the existing state standards and the published work of the Curriculum Framework Commission, the Social Studies Standards Clarification Design Team identified Big Ideas, Enduring Understandings, and Essential Questions¹ to guide the development of the standard clarifications and ensuing professional development for teachers.

The purpose of the Social Studies Clarifications document is to inform teachers on the meaning of the standards and suggest ideas for how teachers might help students to uncover the meaning of the standards -- without providing a list of content to cover. Teachers, schools, and school districts can use the document as a means to guide the process of creating grade-level syllabi, to develop transfer tasks that demonstrate understanding, and to design aligned units of instruction. The Social Studies Clarifications document is a tool for alignment of curriculum, assessment, and instruction to the state standards.

Big Idea

- Alignment of curriculum, instruction, and assessment to the Delaware standards to reach the level of understanding defined in the standards

Enduring Understandings

- Continued progress in aligning curriculum, instruction, and assessment in Delaware classrooms will increase scores on any assessment that measures transfer of knowledge in critical thinking and application, including the DSTP.
- Teachers in Delaware schools require training in backward design and other models that ensure alignment in classrooms.
- Assessments will center on students demonstrating understanding through transfer rather than selecting correct answers through recall. Transfer of learning is the use of knowledge and skills in a new context.
- New kinds of assessment (transfer tasks) will require a rethinking of instruction. New instructional methods will require new tools.
- Interdisciplinary, integrated approaches that require understanding of cultural contexts and application of skills to contemporary issues are essential to help students understand both the boundaries and the relationships between the four disciplines of social studies.

Essential Questions

- To what degree are curriculum, assessment, and instruction aligned to state standards in Delaware classrooms? How would we know?

¹ The Delaware Department of Education consulted with Grant Wiggins, co-author of *Understanding by Design*, to backward design for components of the Statewide Recommended Curriculum. Other backward design frameworks operate under similar principles.

- What professional development can model alignment and backward design for Delaware teachers?
- How important is social studies in the education of the whole student?
- How will social studies contribute to effective citizenship?
- How should civics, economics, geography, and history be integrated effectively in Delaware classrooms?

How important is social studies in the education of the whole student?

This question is answered by the 1995 release of the State of Delaware Social Studies Curriculum Framework Content Standards. An essential component of public education is the development of the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary for participatory citizenship. Social Studies prepares young people to become informed and active citizens who accept their responsibilities, understand their rights, and participate actively in society and government. Effective citizens must be able to research issues, form reasoned opinions, support their positions, and engage in the political process. Young people are expected to learn a genuine respect for the rights of others, a concern for the common good, and a commitment to such basic democratic principles as equal rights and majority rule.

Today's graduates live in a society where they have freedom to make decisions that affect their lives and the lives of others. But they also face a greater number of choices with each decision. Social Studies provides skills and knowledge necessary for individuals to become competent decision makers, both in their personal lives and when making societal choices.

How will Social Studies contribute to effective citizenship?

The Social Studies curriculum incorporates four disciplines: civics, economics, geography, and history. Civics, economics, geography, and history each offer distinct approaches and develop skills for examining common subject matter, which can be integrated to address a particular issue or event.

Civics directly addresses citizenship education in the context of political systems. Students study the assumptions upon which governments are founded, and the strategies governments employ to achieve their goals. With respect to the United States, students learn the underlying principles of representative democracy, the constitutional separation of powers, and the rule of law. Citizens need to comprehend that an essential premise of representative democracy is the willingness to place a premium on personal participation in social decision-making. Studying civics prepares students to translate beliefs into actions and ideas into policies, to discharge their responsibilities while protecting their rights and the rights of others.

Economics analyzes the production, allocation, distribution, and use of resources. Students examine the inherent relationship between costs and benefits, and the values associated with them. Understanding economic principles, whole economies, and the interactions between different types of economies helps students comprehend the exchange of information, capital, and products across the globe. Citizens need to be able

to assess the impact of market influences and governmental actions on the economy in which they live. They need to understand the relation of economic systems and values to cultural values. Studying economics better equips students to make sound personal economic choices, and to participate effectively in social decision-making as citizens in an increasingly competitive and interdependent global economy.

Geography organizes life situations in terms of *where* they occur. People interact with the natural world in culturally distinct ways to produce unique places, and those places change over time. The methods and perspectives of geography give students a spatial understanding of the world, and the ability to evaluate information in spatial terms. Citizens need to be able to examine the varying ways that peoples interact with their environments, and appreciate the diversity of the places those interactions create. They need to understand that the different ways in which people view places and conceptualize regions will affect their actions. Studying geography increases students' ability to analyze complex situations, events, and trends, and draw logical inferences from them.

History organizes events and phenomena in terms of *when* they occurred, examining where, how, and why they took place. Students study how individuals and societies have changed and interacted over time. They gather historical data, then examine, analyze, and interpret this data, presenting their results in a clear, critical manner. They organize events through chronologies, and evaluate cause-and-effect relationships among them. Citizens need to be able to research issues in order to understand the effect of historical developments and trends on contemporary events. They need the ability to examine the actions of other people faced with similar choices in different times. Studying history empowers students to form conclusions about the potential consequences of available options.

How should civics, economics, geography, and history be integrated effectively in Delaware classrooms?

Separate content standards for each discipline are not intended to imply that they should be taught in isolation, but to suggest each discipline's unique contribution to an understanding of the world. Instruction should not consist only of history, for example, without reference to geography or economics; interdisciplinary approaches are essential to reinforce students' comprehension. The individual standards should be viewed as building blocks which can be combined in any number of ways to create a solid foundation for effective citizenship.

Cultural contexts and contemporary issues serve as significant unifying themes for interdisciplinary instruction.

Understanding cultural contexts is critical to citizenship because the United States has an extraordinarily diverse population. Our citizens hail from all corners of the earth, espouse the tenets of every religion, and carry on the traditions of hundreds of different cultures. This has resulted in the creation of a uniquely American culture, flavored and enhanced by those retained traditions. One of the more fundamental American ideals is that, in a nation of immigrants, citizens are not asked to divorce themselves from their

heritage but to contribute it to the national milieu, and that American culture forms the essential social context for our society. Exploring that American context helps students appreciate the contribution of various cultures to the diversity from which we all draw strength. Further, understanding the importance of cultural context to all societies is a powerful tool for students to use in examining both positive and negative consequences when cultures interact.

Delaware schools are preparing our students to live in the twenty-first century, and while it is not possible to predict with certainty the issues which will concern Americans in the future, students prepare by learning the skills necessary to analyze contemporary issues. Some of these issues represent threats to our society: wars, poverty, or ecological disasters. Some affect the way we view ourselves: immigration, civil rights, and women's rights. Others suggest possible solutions to our most difficult problems: information technology, conservation efforts, or volunteer organizations tackling social concerns. By applying skills gained in the study of the core disciplines to contemporary issues, teachers prepare their students to deal with future challenges in their adult lives. Students learn that events are subject to different interpretations, and that they have to be capable of analyzing competing positions before making a decision. This also instills the expectation that every American citizen has both the responsibility and the right to take part in the decision-making process.

Learning in Delaware classrooms should be active rather than passive. The transfer of factual knowledge through formal presentation will always be necessary, but these standards also require an emphasis on critical analysis, problem-solving, and application of knowledge. Assessments should center on students demonstrating understanding by transferring concepts into new contexts rather than recalling correct answers. Opportunities to teach the standards in depth should be identified in the curriculum. A teacher should use open-ended questions that have no definite right or wrong answers to invite the open debate and discussion that is most conducive to understanding. Instruction should be enhanced using the resources relevant to each content area and each standard within the content area. Students should demonstrate understanding, analysis, and application by using the tools of social studies “to think with” — maps, charts, graphs, diary and journal entries, photographs and drawings, newspaper headlines, political surveys, etc.

What professional development can model alignment and backward design for Delaware teachers?

The standards for Social Studies are challenging and support the ideal of preparing young people to become effective citizens. There is no higher civic responsibility for our public schools than the preparation of effective citizens, and that implies the necessity for insuring that the resources exist to discharge this responsibility.

Training and other forms of teacher support must be provided to make the adoption of this curriculum a reality. Creating new units or assessment tasks that require transfer will require time for research and reflection, input from content-area experts, the creation of learning communities within the professional staff of a school or district, and the

opportunity to test ideas in the classroom. Staff development needs to be emphasized, and institutions which train teachers will have to review their own practices in light of these expectations.

The Social Studies Standards Clarification document is organized as the standards are -- spiraling upward in complexity and depth from Standard One through Standard Four in each content area, with each standard's benchmarks from K-3, 4-5, 6-8, and 9-12. Each standard will have at least one Enduring Understanding, and each benchmark will have at least one Essential Question.

- **Enduring Understandings** provide teachers with specific insights about big ideas that students should leave school with. They are the specific inferences, based on the content standards, which have lasting value beyond the classroom. They are central to a discipline, applicable from K-12, addressed with differing levels of sophistication at different grade levels, and are transferable to new situations.
- **Essential Questions** are derived from the benchmarks and frame the teaching and learning, pointing toward key issues and ideas, suggesting meaningful and provocative inquiry into the content. Essential Questions come from the Enduring Understandings and benchmarks and should be used in classrooms by both teachers and students. They are questions that have more than one answer. They promote inquiry, stimulate thought, and spark more questions. When teachers use essential questions to frame their unit development, they set the stage for higher-order thinking and problem-based learning that promote the transfer of knowledge to new situations.

The goal of Social Studies is citizenship learned through cultural contexts and contemporary issues.

Overarching Understandings for Social Studies, K-12

- Effective citizens can research issues, form reasoned opinions, support their positions, and engage in the political process.
- Effective governance requires responsible participation from diverse individuals who translate beliefs and ideas into lawful action and policy.
- The structure of government in different societies reflects the reasons why, when, and where that government is formed.
- Distinctive places and cultures result from human interaction with the environment.
- The different ways in which people view places and conceptualize regions will affect their actions.
- Different geographic tools may be used to organize data, locate a place, reveal patterns, and solve problems.
- Individual, societal, and governmental choices about scarce resources have both positive and negative consequences for economies in an increasingly interdependent and competitive global economy.
- Researching, interpreting, and drawing conclusions from the past enables better decisions for the future.

Overarching Essential Questions, K-12

- What is a good citizen? What does it mean to be a citizen?
- To what extent is a well-governed society a product of an informed and active citizenry?
- To what degree do people need government?
- What is the significance of *where* and *when* events occur? How does it affect the way people live?
- To what extent does studying the past inform the future? Does history change?
- Why can't I have everything I want?
- How does the way information is organized affect the way it is perceived?
- How can thinking like a political scientist, an economist, a geographer, and a historian help students solve real-world problems?
- What's the evidence? How do you know?
- How can an encounter with something new change one's view of the world?