

Executive Summary

Submitted by the Chair and Vice Chair of the Social Studies Standards Recommendation Committee 2023 to the Tennessee State Board of Education

On August 28-31, 2023, the Social Studies Standards Recommendation Committee (SRC) met to review the K-12 Tennessee state social studies standards and practices, including the public and educator survey feedback and revisions made by the Educator Advisory Teams (EAT). The following report outlines reflections and observations made by the SRC that are pertinent for communication to the Tennessee State Board of Education.

Summary of Process of the SRC:

The SRC work began with four virtual meetings – the first two were closed to the public as the purpose of the meetings was non-deliberative, to educate committee members on the process and the expectations of the committee. These meetings were held on May 16, 2023, and June 27, 2023. The final two virtual meetings were open to the public and the focus of these meetings was to understand proposed changes that were made to the standards by the EAT and the appointment of a chair and vice chair. These meetings occurred on July 25, 2023, and August 15, 2023. During the August 15, 2023, meeting, SRC members shared grade level/content priorities that would shape the agenda for the in-person work when the SRC met in August. Top priorities shared included addressing the move of Tennessee History from fifth grade to third grade, as well as the incorporation of Tennessee History in the middle and high school courses. The public survey feedback was made available to all committee members both electronically and in print, at members' request.

The SRC met in Nashville for four days (August 28-31, 2023) and approached the process by starting with a review of the proposed standards in kindergarten and working through fifth grade, then eighth grade U.S. History, and 11th grade U.S. History and Geography. After completing the United States History content heavy courses, the committee focused their attention on sixth and seventh grade World History and high school World History and Geography. The final two high school graduation required courses followed: United States Government and Civics and Economics. The work concluded on the final day, when the SRC began addressing all State approved high school elective courses. Through this process, we reviewed proposed standards with special attention paid to the public survey comments, a letter received from the Tennessee Senate Education Committee, explanation for changes to current standards from the EAT, and recommendations made by interested organizations (such as TN History for Kids). The SRC incorporated their professional areas of expertise to consider content, wording, and intent of standards. Additionally, the SRC streamlined the bulleted lists that accompany several standards and reviewed the six social studies practices for all grade bands. In a few grade levels, the quantity of standards was reduced.

Proposed Revisions to Standards: Elementary Grades 3, 4, 5 and TN History

If approved by the Board, the elementary grades third, fourth, and fifth will see more shifts than other grade levels. Originally, the EAT recommended that Tennessee History be moved from fifth grade to third

grade, citing concerns that there was an excessive amount of content and not adequate time to cover it all. The members of the General Assembly were clear on their preference that Tennessee history remain in fifth grade. Taking into account the feedback from both groups, the SRC met those requests by adjusting the sequencing of social studies standards in the elementary grades. Therefore, the proposed standards include U.S. History part 1 in third grade, U.S. History part 2 in fourth grade and Tennessee History along with Geography in fifth grade.

The SRC recommends this sequencing because:

- Literacy is a major focus in third grade, and we believe it will be easier to find books and literature to support both instruction on early American History and literacy.
- We also believe that basic instruction on early America gained in third grade will lay a strong foundation that fifth grade teachers can build on when teaching TN History, and eighth grade teachers when they instruct on the same content, but in more detail.
- Grades six and seven are heavy on geography skills. With such a large gap between instruction on geography skills in third grade and the embedded geography standards in sixth grade, geography on the state assessment can be challenging for our students. Moving geography to fifth grade will help to set our sixth grade students up for success. We believe this sequencing is in the best interest of our students and their success in the middle school courses, which have a significant amount of geography embedded into the course content on ancient civilizations.

Contemporary Issues (HS elective)

This elective course was changed substantially because it has been the last to receive attention from the EAT or the SRC during the last two standards review cycles. The course description and standards were updated to make it adaptable to changing times, given it will be a few years before these standards take effect and longer before they are reviewed again. The SRC's goal is to prepare students to effectively analyze media sources, participate in the civic process and engage in discourse using reasoning and logic.

Post-SRC Meeting Action

The SRC committee adjourned on the afternoon of Thursday, August 31, 2023. Two weeks after adjournment, the SRC committee received a letter from the Tennessee House of Representatives Education Subcommittee requesting that the SRC reconvene to consider the time designation notations found throughout the State standards document – specifically to remove the designations BCE/ CE from the document and replace them with BC / AD instead. A special virtual session of the SRC was called on Thursday, September 28, 2023. All SRC members were present and the request made by the legislators was discussed. The committee voted unanimously to change the time designations in module titles, unit overviews and course descriptions. The committee voted to leave the sixth grade standard 6.01 as it is currently taught, which asks students to identify both time designations used in historical writing, BCE/BC as well as AD/CE. At this same virtual meeting, the committee also revisited and voted to modify select Tennessee History topics where committee members felt adjustments would improve the quality of the standard.

Additional Notes and Considerations

The SRC strongly recommends that the Tennessee Department of Education create guidance documents for Social Studies teachers, similar to those that exist for other core content areas (ELA, Science, and Math). Social Studies teachers deserve the same amount of support and guidance that other subject areas receive. Social Studies is the one content area with high-stakes testing (TCAP/state EOCs) with no content-based point of contact for State-wide support. Due to the lack of personnel support for Social Studies, we recommend providing:

- An instructional focus document to provide teachers with more context and focus for each of the standards.
- A crosswalk between the current and the new standards to indicate where there are changes from the currently taught standards.
- Gap lessons for fifth grade elementary teachers, as this change will mean fifth grade students will not receive instruction on U.S. History when the switch is made to Geography in fifth grade. This content will be covered again in the high school U.S. History course.

Finally, the SRC recommends that State-wide training be made available to educators to understand and apply the standards for K-12 social studies. Many districts in our State do not have a designated member of their Local Education Agency (LEA) or district office that directly supports social studies, leaving teachers to create or research updates and changes independently. The content found within K-12 social studies is rich and critically important for students to demonstrate proficient knowledge and understanding. Tennessee's dedicated teachers need and deserve this content-specific support.