
Social Studies Standards

The Background:

In October 2014, Governor Haslam announced the creation of a standards review website that would be open to the public to review and offer feedback on what Tennessee students should know and be able to do by the end of each K-12 school year in both mathematics and English language arts (ELA). At the time of that announcement, Governor Haslam also laid out a comprehensive standards review process. This process was further expounded upon by the 109th Tennessee General Assembly in Pub. Ch. 423, which charged the State Board of Education with overseeing not only the review of math and ELA standards but also science and social studies standards.

State Board Standards Review [policy 3.209](#) requires that the Board review all sets of academic standards at a minimum of every six (6) years. However, the State Board called for a review of the social studies standards earlier than the minimum six years, in response to concerns and feedback from teachers, parents, and other stakeholders. Pursuant to Pub. Ch. 423, the current state standards were made available on the state's standards review website from January 21 through April 30, 2016. Thousands of responses to the standards were received, resulting in nearly 64,000 public reviews and 15,000 comments.

In spring 2016, an advisory team composed of 25 Tennessee social studies educators was selected through a competitive application process. Members of the team were from all regions of the state, large and small districts, and urban and rural areas alike. The educator advisory team met for 10+ days during summer 2016, reviewing every individual standard and revising the standards using the public feedback as well as their own expertise.

The revised set of standards was posted for another period of public feedback from September 13 through December 15, 2016, and received almost 54,000 reviews and 10,000 comments. The 10-member Standards Recommendation Committee (SRC), appointed by the Governor, Lt. Governor, and Speaker of the House of Representatives, convened for 12 meetings and met for nearly 100 hours in-person to consider the revised standards and public feedback received on the state website. The committee utilized the various pieces of public feedback to guide their final recommendations for the draft standards. The SRC approved a new standards draft at their March 29, 2017 meeting.

The majority of revisions to the standards made by both the educator advisory team and SRC were in direct response to stakeholder feedback and specifically focus on:

- Making the standards more manageable by streamlining were
- Ensuring rigorous standards to prepare Tennessee students for postsecondary success
- Ensuring that the standards are developmentally and age-appropriate
- Removing curriculum embedded within the current standards as stated in law
- Ensuring that the standards are vertically-aligned and have an intentional grade-level progression

New social studies practice skills were incorporated within the standards document. These practices are intended to be skills that students develop over time, embedded in the teaching of the subject area content. Examples of these skills are analyzing primary sources or constructing and defending an argument.

The format of the standards has been changed, so that they now appear vertically (landscape) rather than horizontally (portrait). This makes for easier reading and navigation of the document as well as a more coherent structure and flow within each grade level and course.

Since first reading of the standards, State Board staff reviewed additional feedback submitted to Board members from a variety of stakeholders. State Board staff also worked to align the standards with recent legislation affecting social studies. Major changes and updates since first reading include:

- **Tennessee History:** On May 9, 2017, the 110th Tennessee General Assembly passed the Senator Douglas Henry Tennessee History Act, mandating that a required Tennessee history course be taught in grades K-12. This legislative action (Pub. Ch. 482) prompted further changes to the draft standards, and a small group of educator committee and SRC members convened on May 30, 2017 to create this new course. Additionally, they opted to maintain Tennessee history content within 3rd, 4th, and 8th grades, high school U.S. history, and a Tennessee history elective course for high school.
- **Courses split into two parts:** 3rd grade and 5th grade are now split into parts 1 and 2. This change required reformatting and renumbering the standards in those grade levels, changing references to those courses and corresponding standards within the document, revisiting the overviews of each section and the description of each course.
- **Sikhism added:** The Sikh Coalition reached out to Board members regarding the inclusion of Sikhism in the standards. In consultation with the educator committee, Board staff added Sikhism to the study of world religions (CI.18) in the high school elective Contemporary Issues.
- **Grammatical and formatting changes:** Several changes have been made throughout the standards document to correct issues related to typographical errors, punctuation, misspellings, inconsistent language/terminology, and formatting mistakes. One example of this was correcting the consistent spelling of “Battle of Kings Mountain” (5.32, 8.20, TN.08).
- **Elimination of redundancies:** The draft was revised to reduce redundancies throughout the standards. One example of this was in standards 3.10 and 3.12, where 3rd grade students were asked twice to locate Nashville on a map.
- **Introduction expanded:** The document’s introduction now includes clarifying information on and legal citations related to civics instruction and the teaching of Tennessee history.
- **Rewording for clarity:** There were a few standards that contained appropriate content but were unclear or confusing in how they were written. An example of this is 6.35, which now reads “Explain the significance of the unification of ancient China into the first Chinese empire by Qin Shi Huangdi, beginning the Qin Dynasty.”
- **Revising content strands:** For some standards, the content strands were incorrect or incomplete. For example, 8.35 (previously 8.38) now has a “T” for Tennessee connection.

The Recommendation:

The Standards Recommendation Committee recommends adoption of this item on final reading. The SBE staff concurs with this recommendation.