
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 Public Chapter 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 Public Chapter 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. Both K-12 educators and higher education faculty worked side-by-side to consider what is best for students now as well as in their postsecondary studies and career. As part of this process, Public Chapter 423 requires that "each advisory team shall review the current standards for its subject matter and grade level together with the comments and suggestions gathered from the public and educators." 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 SRC also heard feedback from across the state through regional meetings and roundtables with educators and parents as well as reports from the higher education community and external stakeholders. The committee utilized the various pieces of public feedback to guide their final recommendations for the draft standards. Based on the specific recommendations of the SRC, the standards then underwent one final revision. The SRC approved this new standards draft at their March 29, 2017 meeting.

The majority of proposed 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

Additionally, new social studies practice skills have been 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 also 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.

Finally, the following topics of interest have been revised within the standards:

Tennessee History: Tennessee history is integrated with American history in elementary and middle school. Important Tennessee events and individuals are presented alongside significant events in American history. In addition, the draft standards feature a focus on early Tennessee history and geography. Finally, a new permanent elective course focused on Tennessee History has been added.

Civics: The draft standards integrate civics throughout many grades and courses. Civics continue to be a heavy focus in elementary school and are also integrated within later American history courses. The draft standards feature a revised U.S. Government and Civics course, which includes a section specifically on civic participation.

Religion: The state standards are prohibited by statute from promoting or proselytizing any religion. Religion is covered in the draft social studies standards in a historical context so that students are able to understand the impact that various religions have had on the development of history. All major world religions are covered in the standards. The draft standards that address particular religions are covered in the following manner:

Describe the origins and central features of (insert religion)

- Key Person(s)
- Sacred Texts
- Basic Beliefs

Civil Rights: The draft standards include civil rights standards and topics as early as in the 5th grade. Civil rights continue to be covered throughout American history. Elements of civil rights are also covered in world history courses as well.

Geography: In the draft standards, geography is integrated in grades K-12. Geography is featured in early grades with a focus on basic U.S. and Tennessee geography. In later grades, geography is integrated in both American and world history courses. Finally, within the newly created social studies practice standards, one standard, spanning grades K-12, has a particular focus on geographic awareness.

The Recommendation:

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