

Proposed Social Studies Standards 2022

Frequently Asked Questions

Updated: Sept. 12, 2022

Who developed the standards?

The proposed standards were developed by the Social Studies Standards Revision Commission, a group of 15 individuals from across South Dakota. The commission included history and government experts, business leaders, state legislators, representatives from the Native American community, and educators at both the K-12 and higher education levels. It also included parents, who bring a special perspective to education. Each person on the commission made valuable contributions to its work. Conversation was robust, productive, and respectful.

How were the standards developed?

Content standards always start with a draft from which to work. Professor Morrissey provided a draft based on work by Hillsdale College, a liberal arts college in Michigan. Over the course of several meetings, commission members applied this draft to South Dakota. The group eliminated some items, added some items, and edited many others. The public comment period, which lasts more than six months, allows every South Dakotan the opportunity to weigh in, as well.

What are the basic themes underlying the standards?

These standards will create an educational experience that captivates students, laying the groundwork for a lifetime of learning and responsible citizenship. The standards cover broad subject areas: history (American and world), civics, and economics, with geography standards integrated throughout. They serve as a common foundation of knowledge shared by all students, regardless of background or school attended. They are built to engender the following:

- Genuine content in the form of specific stories, historical figures, maps, research, images, and historical documents.
- Sound skills for students to make sense of the past, understand their neighbors, earn a livelihood, and exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship with prudence.
- Honest, balanced, and complete accounts of historical events and debates that foster a love of country that is not blind to its faults.
- History and civics instruction free from political agendas and activism.

How are the proposed standards better than the current standards?

These standards set the bar for high-quality social studies standards in this country. They are clearly written, rich in content, address the full story of our nation's past, and incorporate South Dakota- and Native American-specific topics throughout the grades. In fact, these standards represent the largest emphasis on Native American history of any proposed standards to date. As our nation grapples with challenges such as civic illiteracy and uncivil discourse, a change in approach to how we prepare future citizens is in order. Some of the most significant differences between the proposed and current standards include:

- Enhanced content
 - The standards are written in clear and concise language – language that educators, parents, and students can understand. The subpoints within each proposed standard are intended to provide clarity and specificity for teachers in their planning and instruction.

- Expanded South Dakota and Native American history and civics
 - Rather than teaching state, tribal, and reservation history and civics in a single unit or year, these standards expand and integrate the study of local history into American history overall, pausing often at points where a local event aligns with events in American history.
- Integrated civics
 - These standards integrate basic civics instruction into all American history classes at every grade level.
- “Spiraled” sequencing
 - Students will study world history four times and American history and/or civics five times over the course of their years of education.
 - With each encounter, students build on what they previously learned, deepen their understanding, and acquire knowledge that endures long after they graduate high school.

How is Native American history incorporated?

These standards represent the largest emphasis on Native American history of any proposed standards to date. Commission members very specifically focused on the importance of incorporating Native American history. These standards infuse Native American history throughout every grade level, and they contain significantly more references to Native American topics than the current (2015) standards. They allow for teachers to lead students in meaningful discussions about events, people, and places that will help students understand and learn from the past.

It is important to note that a number of the proposed standards are directly aligned to the Oceti Sakowin Essential Understandings (OSEUs). Schools are encouraged to continue using the OSEUs as they address Native American history and civic topics, as well as in other academic content areas where they might be applied.

How is South Dakota history addressed in the standards?

These standards expand and integrate state, tribal, and reservation history and civics throughout a student’s K-12 career, pausing often at points where a local event aligns with events in American history. This contrasts with the current practice of isolating the study of South Dakota history to one point in elementary school (4th grade). This will ensure that children study the history of South Dakota frequently and in a manner that shows the state’s importance to the overall American story. Additionally, schools may choose to offer a separate one-semester high school elective class on South Dakota and Native American history and civics.

Are the standards age-appropriate? Are they too rigorous?

Our kids deserve the very best education possible. They will rise to the challenge, as thousands of other students across the country do when following standards similar to these. It is important to have high expectations for students. We are preparing them to be the future citizens and leaders of our state, country, and world. The proposed standards introduce key concepts early on. These facts give them the base line for critical thinking about our nation’s history later on in their schooling. Students then follow the American story and learn how America has both failed and succeeded in living up to our founding ideals. Good social studies instruction introduces fundamental concepts in a simple and clear way in the early years (think: the Roman Republic), so older students can understand and delve more deeply into

complex topics (think: John Adams advocating for a republican form of government that would avoid Rome’s calamity).

Do these standards have a focus on rote memorization?

The proposed standards require some memorization of critical knowledge (e.g., recite the preamble to the U.S. Constitution) that lays the foundation for more complex study later on. This is similar to how a student needs to memorize his or her multiplication tables in order to successfully engage with more complex mathematical concepts later in the student’s K-12 experience.

How will teachers have time to cover the entirety of the standards?

Over the years, K-12 education in this country has become very focused on reading and math. Other subjects such as social studies, science, and fine arts have been crowded out – especially at the elementary level – due to this focus. This has led to what some refer to as a national civic crisis, which these standards work to address. The points within each proposed standard are intended to provide clarity for teachers in their planning and instruction. Some points might encompass an entire class period, while others might take just moments of quality instruction.

I’ve heard that the proposed standards “whitewash” American history?

No, that is absolutely false. The standards incorporate some of the best of American history, and they incorporate some of the worst. We must learn the lessons of our past and apply them to our future. For example, the standards address some of the darkest points in American history, such as slavery and the forced removal of Native Americans, at various points in a student’s learning, opening the door for teachers and students to have meaningful, age-appropriate conversations about our nation’s past.

I’ve heard that the proposed history standards incorporate Christianity. Is that true?

Students learn *about* religions; they are not asked to believe the ideas of the religion. History studies people’s actions. People act based on the ideas they hold, and many of those ideas are tied to religious values. In order to understand history, students must have an understanding of historical thought. This requires a knowledge of the different religions that influenced the world over time. These standards help students learn the historical facts about major world religions, such as Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, and others.

How will we implement these standards in classrooms across the state?

The Department of Education and members of the Social Studies Standards Revision Commission recognize these standards represent a significant shift and marked improvement in our approach to teaching social studies.

Both entities believe it is important to provide support and technical assistance to schools across the state, as they work towards implementation. To that end, the department has earmarked approximately \$800,000 of funding available from Governor Noem’s history and civics initiative to accomplish this work. The department also will use existing financial resources, as needed, to support a quality implementation that sets South Dakota students up for success in the long term.

The standards inherently support teachers in three ways:

- By providing teachers with substantial and meaningful content to teach
- By providing teachers with a chronological ordering to standards

- By providing straightforward language and using commonplace vocabulary to determine if a student has achieved a standard

What will state support for implementation of the standards look like?

These standards represent a significant shift and marked improvement in our approach to teaching social studies. The Department of Education will provide support for implementation through professional development, creation and curation of resources, and technical assistance. Governor Noem has dedicated \$800,000 in funding from her history and civics initiative for this purpose.

A critical part of the state's support will be to provide professional development opportunities for teachers at all levels, with a special focus on elementary teachers. These opportunities will begin in summer 2023 and will allow teachers to become familiar with, and gain confidence in, teaching the new standards. These opportunities will become part of the department's ongoing support.

The department also will work with history, government, and tribal experts to collect and develop South Dakota and Native American specific resources. Recognizing that these resources may not currently exist in a central location, this team of experts will curate a collection of resources and house them in a central location where teachers can easily access.

Finally, the department will provide a tool for districts to evaluate potential curriculum.

Will school districts need to update social studies curriculum?

As with any adoption of new academic content standards, school districts may have to update their local curriculum to align with the state standards. The implementation timeline allows for a transition period for this to occur. As previously described, the Department of Education will support districts through the transition by providing professional development, creation and curation of related resources, and providing a tool for districts to evaluate potential curriculum. Governor Noem secured approximately \$800,000 in funding in 2021 to carry out this work.