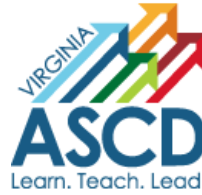




**VIRGINIA
SOCIAL STUDIES
LEADERS CONSORTIUM**



**AMERICAN
HISTORICAL
ASSOCIATION**



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

January 17, 2023

**VSSLC, VASCD, AHA, VCSS, NCSS, & VGA Respond to
the January Draft History & Social Science Standards of Learning for Virginia Public Schools**

The Virginia Social Studies Leaders Consortium (VSSLC), Virginia Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (VASCD), American Historical Association (AHA), Virginia Council for the Social Studies (VCSS), National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS), and Virginia Geographic Alliance (VGA) have collaborated to review the 2023 Draft History and Social Science Standards released by the Virginia Superintendent of Public Instruction on January 6, 2023.

Based on our thorough review, we strongly urge the Virginia Board of Education (VBOE) to consider the [Collaborative Draft Standards](#) submitted by VSSLC, VASCD, and AHA on December 20, 2022, for first review. The January draft standards issued by the Superintendent of Public Instruction are neither historically rigorous nor reflective of the established process previously approved by VBOE. Moreover, they are unrealistic, containing a vast quantity of rote memorization that is neither useful nor likely for content knowledge retention.

Virginia Code § 22.1-253.13:1. states that the *“Standards of Learning in all subject areas shall be subject to regular review and revision to maintain rigor and to reflect a balance between content knowledge and the application of knowledge in preparation for eventual employment and lifelong learning.”* The January draft standards fail to meet the specific requirements of Virginia code by increasing the number of standards and substandards required to be taught in a given school year without increasing instructional time. This imbalance will pressure educators to require rote memorization for the sake of content coverage without the "application of knowledge" detailed in the Virginia Code and time for high-quality instruction that leads to deeper understanding. Consider how much content was added to the January draft standards: 737 total standards and substandards in 2015; 744 in the December “Collaborative Standards”; and **869** in the January draft standards. The January draft standards include **132** additional standards (approximately 10 standards per grade level) compared to the 2015 SOLs, with no additional instructional time.

Our response to the January draft standards is organized into five categories: *Process*, *Developmentally Inappropriate Content*, *Rote Learning*, *Mistakes and Omissions*, and *Course Sequence*.

PROCESS

The process from August to November, and now through January, has left our organizations with ongoing concerns and uncertainties. The violation of the established process previously approved by VBOE has not been repaired, and the January draft appears to have the same lack of transparency and breach of public trust as the November draft standards. The January draft seems to have been developed in isolation without adequate input from subject-matter experts across Virginia. In the January 6 news release, Superintendent Balow claimed that this draft involved “input from more than 200 reviewers,” and we question how many and who of those 200 were engaged between November 17, 2022 and January 6, 2023.

In the spirit of restoring the established process previously overseen by the History and Social Science office at the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE), we urge VBOE to consider the December “Collaborative Standards” as a viable option for first review.

DEVELOPMENTALLY INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT

The January draft includes several examples of content that is excessively complex and beyond generally recognized cognitive levels of students in the grades in which they appear.

For example:

- SOL 2.9b requires 2nd grade students to learn about the War of 1812, which is an exceptionally complex conflict involving expansion, international trade, and maritime rights. Historians consulted as part of our collaborative review agree that this event is not sufficiently important to the broad sweep of American history to take the amount of time necessary for a student to understand it in any meaningful way at this grade level.
- SOL 2.10a&b require 2nd grade students to learn about complex historical figures such as Steve Jobs, Jonas Salk, and Neil Armstrong. This standard would require considerable background knowledge for students to understand these individuals in such contexts as microchips, vaccinations, and NASA. This content is part of 21 additional standards and substandards in 2nd grade when compared to the December “Collaborative Standards.” This level of additional content is simply not feasible and illustrates the absence of feedback from outside professionals in the development of the January draft standards.
- SOL 2.4b requires 2nd graders to learn about “*the state motto and the image on the Virginia state flag and its meaning.*” This requires young students to learn the Latin phrase “Sic Semper Tyrannis” and that it translates to “thus be it always to tyrants.” It also requires them to then interpret the state seal on the Virginia flag that features a nude depiction of the female figure of “Virtue” standing on top of a murdered king. This is far too complex for students to understand in terms of needed context and background knowledge, and it is further socially inappropriate to expose 7 and 8 year-old children to depictions of nudity and political violence and assassination. This standard is more appropriately placed in the secondary level.
- 4th graders are required to learn about the Supreme Court case of *Green v. New Kent County* which dealt with “freedom of choice” plans that served to *circumvent* desegregation in public schools following the decision in *Brown II*. This significant case is far too detailed and complex for 4th graders, and it is more suitable for college-level courses in history and law. We recommend that students continue to focus on

the significance of the landmark case of *Brown v. Board of Education* and the subsequent Massive Resistance campaign that was appropriately detailed in the 2015 SOLs as well as the December “Collaborative Standards.”

ROTE LEARNING

The January draft standards include an excessive amount of required content that cannot be reasonably taught in a given school year. This is not viable. These standards will lead to an increased emphasis on rote memorization at the expense of deeper learning, understanding, and skill development. For example, there are **187** different historical figures featured by name in the January draft standards. This amount of content knowledge is unrealistic, unsustainable, and poorly designed, presenting standards that teach students *what to think, not how to think*.

This outdated approach to history education would adversely affect social studies education and create insurmountable obstacles to student thinking and the high-quality instruction our children deserve. Given the significant increase in content and the number of entirely new standards and substandards listed below, we believe that this represents an *overhaul* of the History and Social Science Standards of Learning (SOLs) and not the “review” as described in Virginia code.

As compared to the December “Collaborative Standards” developed by VSSLC, VASCD, and AHA:

- **10** standards/substandards have been added to **Kindergarten**
- **21** standards/substandards have been added to **2nd grade**
- **11** standards/substandards have been added to **4th grade Virginia Studies**
- **35** standards/substandards have been added to **World Geography**
- **12** standards/substandards have been added to **World History I**
- **10** standards/substandards have been added to **World History II**
- **19** standards/substandards have been added to **VA/U.S. History**
- **7** standards/substandards have been added to **VA/U.S. Government**
- In the K-5 elementary standards, students are required to memorize **85** different historical figures
- In the secondary standards in grades 6-12, students are required to memorize **102** different historical figures
- Contained within this dramatic increase in standards and substandards is superfluous content such as SOL VS.12 which requires 4th graders to identify the “spouses of the eight U.S. Presidents from Virginia.” We agree that all of our past is important; however, these facts are not essential information for a 4th grader to memorize without any consideration of historical significance or the impact of these individuals. Moreover, this type of memorization without meaningful context seldom sparks interest or generates content knowledge retention.

MISTAKES AND OMISSIONS

The January draft standards document contains several mistakes and omissions, undermining its credibility as a set of professional standards of history education. These examples barely scratch the surface:

- Virginia and United States History (Grade 11) begins with the Age of European Exploration. This is misleading for students who should learn that Indigenous peoples of North America had 10,000 years of history prior to European settlement and colonization.

- Indigenous Peoples' Day has been removed as a holiday that students learn about in the elementary curriculum, alongside Columbus Day. The name of Indigenous Peoples' Day as a holiday is not a matter of opinion; it is a presidential proclamation.
- All previous standards dealing with the history of labor unions, strikes, and changes in working conditions have been entirely deleted despite being featured prominently in the 2015 and 2008 versions of the SOLs, as well as the December "Collaborative Standards."
- The term "fascism" has been entirely removed from the standards. This term is essential to any understanding of the Second World War.
- 4th Grade Virginia Studies identifies only white male leaders during the Revolutionary War while also removing James Armistead Lafayette, the African American spy for the Colonial Army who was featured by name in the 2015 SOLs and the December "Collaborative Standards."
- The January draft standards contain several chronological errors and inaccuracies. For example, the establishment of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) is incorrectly included into SOL USII.2g about Reconstruction during the 1870s (the NAACP was actually founded more than a generation later in 1909); in SOL USII.7b, the standard incorrectly states that the Marshall Plan also helped rebuild postwar Japan (this economic recovery program was designed and implemented in Western Europe and had no impact on postwar Japan); and the terrorist attacks on September 11th, 2001 are incorrectly placed within SOL USII.7 about the Cold War (the Cold War ended with the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 and has nothing to do with 9/11). These are not matters of interpretation; they are straightforward facts.
- The January draft omits the 5 themes of geography education. Since 1984, these themes have been essential tools for helping educators avoid outdated traditions of teaching geography through rote memorization. These themes (location, place, human-environment interaction, movement, and region) are included in the 2008 and 2015 SOLs, August 2022 draft, and December "Collaborative Standards." It is unclear why these have been removed.
- Unlike the 2008 and 2015 SOLs, August 2022 draft, and December "Collaborative Standards," the January draft does not encourage teachers and students to learn about and use the tools of modern geography, such as aerial and satellite imagery and geospatial technologies. Learning to apply these tools in history, government, and geography are essential for preparing students for a modern workforce.
- The January draft downplays the interplay between geography and history and the importance that scale of analysis plays in the social studies. Since 2008, Virginia's standards have expected students to learn and understand "how the United States and the student's home community are affected by conditions and events in distant places." This expectation is critical for promoting and creating a geo-literate citizenry.
- The January draft standards contain errors in formatting, mechanics, grammar, and syntax that undermine the document's credibility as a set of professional standards. For example, SOL WHII.8a asks students to identify "major events and leaders of the war, including but not limited to the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, Georges Clemenceau, John J. Pershing, Kaiser Friedrich Wilhelm II, and Woodrow Wilson." This is written in a way that suggests all of those leaders were assassinated. One example of the formatting errors is the inconsistent indent alignment throughout the document, particularly in Grade 5: United States History to 1865. In Grade 11: Virginia and United States History, there appear to be two different font-types used. Throughout the January draft standards, "Peoples" is incorrectly capitalized when referencing Indigenous peoples.

COURSE SEQUENCE

The January draft standards propose a specific course sequence that will cause major disruptions for courses in grades 5-9. If adopted, this mandate would move middle school courses to the elementary level, and high school courses to middle school. This unnecessary shift has the potential to create additional staffing issues as teachers will have to change teaching assignments, grade levels, schools, and perhaps certifications. The altered sequence of courses negatively affects students who are already in the middle of a particular course sequence. Education departments and publishing companies have created grade-appropriate materials to accompany the current SOL sequence. Making these changes without allowing time for the creation of high-quality, enriching, and age-appropriate supporting resources will disrupt student learning and negatively affect social studies education. Without sufficient evidence, research, and data that the re-sequencing of these courses improves student learning, we cannot support the order prescribed in the January draft standards.

RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS

VSSLC, VASCD, and AHA presented the “Collaborative Standards” to VBOE on December 20, 2022, and recommended acceptance for first review. Based on our review of the standards released on January 6th by the Superintendent of Public Instruction, the six organizations that have collaborated on this response stand by that recommendation.

Following acceptance of the December “Collaborative Standards,” we recommend VBOE follow the prescribed process for public comment period leading up to final review. An appropriate timeline will allow Virginia’s educators time prior to the implementation school year to:

- Collaboratively construct a curriculum framework in accordance with the established process, and our organizations offer our services to lead, support, and facilitate as needed.
- Prepare for implementation to align the written, taught, and assessed curriculum.

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About VSSLC

The Virginia Social Studies Leaders Consortium is an organization of social studies specialists, college educators, museum professionals, social studies education non-profit professionals, and representatives from the Virginia Department of Education. We represent all regions of Virginia.

About VASCD

Virginia ASCD (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development), an affiliate of ASCD, is a non-profit membership organization dedicated to advancing excellence in Virginia's schools. We have 1,800 members in Virginia who are teachers, superintendents, teacher educators, school leaders, students, and central office administrators. We represent a variety of roles and share a single purpose - ensuring a world-class education for every Virginia student.

About AHA

The American Historical Association is the largest professional organization serving historians in all fields and all professions. The AHA is a trusted voice advocating for history education, the professional work of historians, and the critical role of historical thinking in public life.

About VCSS

The Virginia Council for the Social Studies engages and supports Virginia educators in advocating and strengthening social studies. The goals of the Virginia Council for the Social Studies are to foster professional growth, develop communication among stakeholders in the social studies community, and to promote the teaching of social studies in Virginia, the United States, and the international sphere. The Virginia Council for the Social Studies is an affiliate of the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS).

About NCSS

Founded in 1921, National Council for the Social Studies is the largest professional association in the country devoted solely to social studies education. NCSS engages and supports educators in strengthening and advocating social studies. With members in all the 50 states, the District of Columbia, and 35 countries, NCSS serves as an umbrella organization for elementary, secondary, and college teachers of history, civics, geography, economics, political science, sociology, psychology, anthropology, and law-related education. The NCSS membership represents K-12 classroom teachers, college and university faculty members, curriculum designers and specialists, social studies supervisors, and leaders in the various disciplines that constitute the social studies.

About VGA

The Virginia Geographic Alliance fosters and supports the enduring power of the geographic perspective in social, environmental and geospatial sciences as they develop in schools, universities, businesses, governments and communications media to advance geo-literacy. Acquiring geographic knowledge, skills and technologies enables people to become productive citizens and lifelong learners who: recognize the importance of place and local-to-global connections; understand changing human-environment interactions; and apply environmental and spatial perspectives in decision-making and problem-solving.