

Guiding Principles for Effective History and Social Science Education

Guiding Principle 1

An effective history and social science education teaches students about the legacy of democratic government.

Study of history and social science prepares students to understand their rights and responsibilities as informed residents and citizens of a democratic society and to appreciate the shared values of this country. To become informed citizens, students need to acquire knowledge and experience of

- the principles and philosophy of government in the founding documents of the United States;
- the structure and purposes of democratic government in the United States at the national, state, and local level;
- the structure and purposes of types of government other than democracy;
- how the concepts of liberty, equality, justice, and human and civil rights shape the United States;
- the achievements of democratic government and the challenges to maintaining it;
- ways to act as a citizen to influence government within the democratic system; and
- the importance of respectful public discourse and dissent in a democracy.

Guiding Principle 2

An effective history and social science education incorporates diverse perspectives and acknowledges that perceptions of events are affected by race, ethnicity, culture, religion, education, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, and personal experience.

The traditional motto of the United States is “*E pluribus unum*” – out of many, one. A history and social science education that does justice to the remarkable diversity of our country must tell the histories of individuals and groups, and honor a plurality of life stories while acknowledging our ongoing struggle to achieve a more perfect union. Teaching how the concepts of freedom, equality, the rule of law, and human rights have influenced United States and world history necessarily involves discussions of race, ethnicity, culture, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, and other characteristics. Effective instruction challenges students to value their own heritage while embracing our common ideals and shared experiences as they develop their own rigorous thinking about accounts of events. Effective instruction celebrates the progress the United States has made in embracing diversity, while at the same time encouraging honest and informed academic discussions about prejudice, racism, and bigotry in the past and present.

Guiding Principle 3

Every student deserves to study history and social science every year, from pre-kindergarten through grade 12.

Like learning to read, write, or perform well in any other subject, learning history and social science takes time. An effective history and social science education is given adequate time in the school day to

build knowledge and skills of increasing complexity. In pre-kindergarten students learn about how cooperation builds community in the classroom, and how all kinds of families and individuals contribute to society. The elementary grade Content Standards are designed to introduce students to the drama of the past, its geographical settings, the habits of good citizenship, and everyday economics, a great deal of which can be integrated with English language arts and literacy, the arts, mathematics, and science. Middle school standards deepen students' capacity to think logically and conduct research. At the high school level, where students should have the opportunity to take at least four courses in United States history, world history, and the social sciences, the standards require interpretation and synthesis of complex ideas about individuals, groups, events, and institutions.

Guiding Principle 4

An effective history and social science education teaches students to think historically.

Taken together, the standards in this Framework present a broad scope of time and place, from human beginnings to the present, with the intent of helping students understand that *their* lives are connected to the long sweep of history. Beginning with the third-grade study of Massachusetts history, students become acquainted with the concepts of chronology, cause-and-effect relationships, and the role chance plays in historical events. In middle and high school, students learn that complex events have both intended and unintended consequences. By examining primary and secondary sources, students develop an appreciation for the importance of historical context and point of view. They learn that participants in historical events can often hold vastly different ideas about how those events unfolded. For example, what the Spanish considered a “conquest” of a new world in the Americas was seen rather differently by those whose lands were being invaded by foreigners. Students also learn that the work of historical investigation is never static because new evidence – a fresh archaeological find, a lost manuscript or photograph found in an archive – can inspire new connections and interpretations. Because historians of different generations can have different perceptions, it is important that readings include a variety of opinions and historical interpretations.

Guiding Principle 5

An effective history and social science education integrates knowledge from many fields of study.

The fields of history, geography, civics, and economics form the core of a history and social science education. Under this broad umbrella are the history of the arts, philosophy and ethics, and religions, and developments in science, technology, and mathematics. Electives at the high school level might include study of regions of the world, anthropology, Constitutional law, criminology, sociology, state or local history and politics, world religions, human rights, or other topics and might include capstone research projects. The Content Standards of this framework are designed to include this breadth of knowledge, not as isolated facts to be simply memorized, but as useable knowledge to be integrated into an understanding of the world.

Guiding Principle 6

An effective history and social science education builds students’ capacities for research, reasoning, making logical arguments, and thinking for themselves.

In an effective history and social science education, students engage in inquiry, reading, research, discussion, writing, and making presentations – these activities are the heart of this Framework’s Standards for History and Social Science Practice and link the history and social science disciplines to English language arts and literacy. In the course of applying these practices, students learn how to evaluate texts for bias intended to influence their opinions, and about the patterns of thought and reasoning of historians, geographers, political scientists, and economists. They learn to raise and refine questions and organize arguments and explanations by using structures such as comparison and contrast, cause and effect, or problem and solution. They learn to apply different forms of analysis, including contextually rich reading, visual analysis, spatial/geographical analysis, or quantitative reasoning.

Guiding Principle 7

An effective history and social science education improves reading comprehension by increasing students’ content knowledge.

A rich education in history and social science involves extensive reading of challenging grade-level texts, which not only contributes to the development of basic reading skills but also introduces students to concepts and academic language that ultimately improve reading comprehension. Researcher Daniel Willingham contends, “Teaching content is teaching reading.”¹¹ Content knowledge improves reading comprehension because it enables a student to make connections about events and ideas across texts. The Content Standards in this framework are organized to provide a coherent progression of knowledge about history, geography, civics, and economics to support students’ capacity to read with understanding in the elementary and middle grades. This foundational knowledge, in turn, prepares students to read texts that address topics of increasing complexity at the high school and college level.

Guiding Principle 8

An effective history and social science education incorporates the study of current events and news/media literacy.

When teaching history and social science, teachers have a unique responsibility to help students consider events – including current events – in a broad historical, geographical, social, or economic context. The Framework’s News/Media Literacy standards for grade 8 and high school are designed to

¹¹ See Marzano, Robert J. (2004) *Building Background Knowledge for Academic Achievement: Research on What Works in Schools*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development; Liana Heitin in *Education Week: Cultural Literacy Creator Carries on Campaign*, (October 12, 2016), Daniel Willingham in *American Educator: How Knowledge Helps*, (Spring 2006), and Willingham in the *New York Times*, *How to Get Your Mind to Read* (November 25, 2017). (see also <http://www.ascd.org/publications/books/104017.aspx> and <http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2016/10/12/cultural-literacy-creator-carries-on-campaign.html?qa=1.171279712.1366275149.1446124290> and <http://www.aft.org/periodical/american-educator/spring-2006/how-knowledge-helps> and <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/25/opinion/sunday/how-to-get-your-mind-to-read.html?smid=tw-nytopinion&smtyp=cur>)

help students take a critical stance toward what they read, hear, and view in newspapers and on websites, television, and social media. Applying these standards, students learn to evaluate information, question and verify its source, distinguish fact from inference, and reasoned judgment supported by evidence from varying degrees of bias.¹²

Guiding Principle 9

An effective history and social science education teaches students about using data analysis and digital tools as research and presentation techniques in the social sciences.

History and social science teachers have a long history of teaching students to read, interpret, and create graphs, charts, maps, timelines, and illustrations. New opportunities for answering questions with data are available in the ever-expanding supply of online databases. Particularly at the high school level, teachers can provide opportunities for students to apply their knowledge of quantitative reasoning and statistics, using “big data” to answer historical questions and solve problems. They can also provide opportunities for students to create digital exhibits that combine visual primary sources, video, and computer graphics to convey complex stories and interpretations of the past.¹³

Guiding Principle 10

An effective history and social science education develops social and emotional skills.

Social and emotional learning has demonstrated an increase in academic achievement and communication skills, improve attitudes and behaviors, and develop empathy.¹⁴ These skills are also practical civic skills that students need to engage effectively with others in the public problem solving of civic and democratic life. Teachers support the development of these skills by:

- helping students understand how their own unique experiences and ideas influence their perceptions of and feelings about history and current situations (self-awareness);
- encouraging students’ own power to take thoughtful action (self-management);
- increasing students’ understanding of others’ fundamental needs and human and civil rights (social awareness);
- increasing students’ capacity to participate in dialogue across differences and to take on the perspectives of others whose experience and position in the world differs from their own (dialogue and perspective-taking);
- encouraging students to collaborate respectfully with diverse peers (relationship skills);

¹² McGrew, Sarah, Ortega, Teresa, Breakstone, Joel, and Wineburg, Sam. (2017). “[The Challenge that’s Bigger than Fake News](#),” in *American Educator*, Fall 2017. (see also <http://www.aft.org/ae/fall2017>)

¹³ For samples of projects in the digital humanities in, see the [Boston Digital Humanities Consortium](#), [DHCommons](#), the [UMass Digital Humanities Initiative](#) (University of Massachusetts Amherst), [Hyperstudio](#) (Massachusetts Institute of Technology), [metaLab at Harvard](#) (Harvard University). (see also <http://bostondh.org/> and <http://digitalhumanities.umass.edu/projects> and <http://hyperstudio.mit.edu/> and <https://metalabharvard.github.io/>)

¹⁴ See Jones, Stephanie M. and Kahn, Jennifer (2017). [The Evidence Base for How We Learn: Supporting Students’ Social, Emotional, and Academic Development](#). Washington, DC: The Aspen Institute, National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development. (see also https://assets.aspeninstitute.org/content/uploads/2018/03/FINAL_CDS-Evidence-Base.pdf)

- providing opportunities for students to define and make informed choices when participating in democratic practices (responsible decision making); and
- creating opportunities for students to work together on projects that aim to promote a public good beyond the classroom, in the school, or in the larger community (civic action)

The Scope, Sequence, and Content of the Grades and Courses

Pre-Kindergarten: Building a Foundation for Living, Learning, and Working Together

Students are introduced to four major fields of social studies: civics (respecting one another, cooperating, and obeying appropriate rules); geography (understanding connections between places and people); history (recalling experiences); and economics (understanding working, buying, selling and trading things).

Kindergarten: Many Roles in Living, Learning, and Working Together

Students learn about classroom democracy, respect for one another, local geography, roles of people, national, state, and community traditions, and economics in the context of work and money.

Grade 1: Leadership, Cooperation, Unity, and Diversity

Students learn about leadership on many levels, the meaning of citizenship, and map types. They explore how the concepts of unity and diversity, respect for differences, and respect of self shape life in the United States, and how people make choices about purchasing goods and services and saving resources.

Grade 2: Global Geography: Places and Peoples, Cultures and Resources

Students learn about global geography, looking at reasons why people settle in particular places, why they migrate, how they bring culture with them, and how they earn a living, exchange goods and services, and save for the future.

Grade 3: Massachusetts, Home to Many Different People

Students study Massachusetts and New England, beginning with their own city or town. They explore interactions among Native Peoples, European settlers and Africans, and learn about the Massachusetts people who led the American Revolution. The standards introduce students to the founding documents of Massachusetts and United States so that they may begin to discuss and apply ideas about self-government as they help develop codes of classroom rules, rights, and responsibilities.

Grade 4: North American Geography and Peoples

Students learn about North America (Canada, Mexico, and the United States) and its peoples from a geographic perspective. They learn about ancient civilizations on the continent and early European exploration as they expand map reading, mapmaking, and geographic reasoning skills introduced in grades 2 and 3. They apply concepts of how geography affects human settlement and resource use, and how the westward expansion of the United States created a modern nation of 50 states and 16 territories.