

AZ History and Social Science Standards are Developmentally Inappropriate for Young Children

All of the K-3 History and Social Science Standards would be considered developmentally inappropriate. Standards that are “developmentally appropriate” are written with an understanding of how children’s minds mature so that the content and material presented correspond to the appropriate stage of mental development. “Age- appropriate” standards adhere to a sequencing that advances a child’s academic progress.

Understanding how children’s minds develop and then matching how the teacher presents the information to them, based on their stage of development, provides for “developmentally appropriate” standards. Research in cognitive science proves that there are *stark* differences in the learning abilities of children age 5 (Kindergarten) and age 8 (Grade 3) and even *more* so when the child turns 11 (Grade 5). In fact, their brains continue to develop and change until adulthood.

The famous child psychologist Jean Piaget determined that those entering school in Kindergarten were on the verge of entering into the Concrete-operational Phase, where their minds best understand things with concrete examples. **What distinguishes this phase from the next, which begins around age 11 or 12, is that they can't yet think abstractly.**

([http://epltt.coe.uqa.edu/index.php?title=Piaget%27s Stages](http://epltt.coe.uqa.edu/index.php?title=Piaget%27s_Stages)) (Emphasis added.)

It makes a difference when we introduce the material so that the child is developmentally ready to understand what is being taught.

Standards that are not developmentally appropriate force the curriculum to include strategies and lessons that aren’t understandable to students. When this happens, teachers must spend an excessive amount of time trying to teach a concept that children aren’t capable of mastering, thus crowding out grade-level, appropriate materials that would *truly* advance the child’s progress.

The proposed AZ History and Social Science Standards fail to honor the *widely held* understanding of childhood development and require children who are in the middle of the concrete operation period to explain, compare, generate, justify, and apply principles that are abstract in nature. For example, the below standard for first grade requires students to:

“1.H1.1 Explain how ideas and innovation can contribute to a community by utilizing primary sources and secondary sources.”

This is indeed “rigorous,” but to explain ideas through *abstract or deductive* reasoning doesn’t “match” the developmental state of a first grade child. This expectation may be appropriate in the upper grades, but not in grades K-3 where children have yet to develop the mental capacity for abstract thinking; their thought process is still too concrete.

If teachers are held accountable for student mastery of these standards on high-stakes testing, valuable classroom time will be spent drilling it into students and will result in *frustrated* children and nervous teachers. A very unfortunate consequence of measuring students against *inappropriate standards* is that teachers are going to see typically developing children as delayed or behind. This will lead to students being held back or tracked into remedial classes that they don’t *really* need. Moreover, such results will negatively affect teacher evaluations, and unfairly so.

In October 2013, Mary Calamia, social worker and psychotherapist serving parents, students, and teachers in 20 school districts in Suffolk County, testified to the New York State Assembly Education Forum. ([http://stopccssinnys.com/uploads/Al_Graf - Mary Calamia full text.pdf](http://stopccssinnys.com/uploads/Al_Graf_-_Mary_Calamia_full_text.pdf))

Her testimony proved the truth of Piaget's systematic study of cognitive development and the concerns of 300 child development experts. She stated:

I also started to receive more calls referring elementary school students who were refusing to go to school. They said they felt 'stupid' and school was 'too hard'" They were throwing tantrums, begging to stay home, and upset even to the point of vomiting. We cannot regulate biology. Young children are simply not wired to engage in the type of critical thinking that the Common Core calls for. That would require a fully developed prefrontal cortex, a part of the brain that is not fully functional until early adulthood. The prefrontal cortex is responsible for critical thinking, rational decision-making, and abstract thinking—all things the Common Core demands prematurely.

In speeches at Notre Dame (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7tSQIJE6VuA>) and before the Ohio House Education Committee, (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GdiFunxrHiw&index=4&list=PLYjhWVZdbWy4OkQISoG09Jie-B9Kv5iSi>) child clinical psychologist Dr. Megan Koschnick explained that standards that young children are expected to meet, e.g., to "collaborate" "engage in multiple discussions" "express thoughts, feelings, and ideas clearly" etc., might be appropriate for training a "global workforce," but they are *not* appropriate learning standards for young children. Dr. Koschnick warned that forcing children to meet standards *beyond* their capacity results in anxiety, frustration, and negative feelings about school, and they eventually "disengage." Such reactions are often misinterpreted as behavioral problems, and many such children are *misevaluated* as in need of remediation.

History:

K-3 is devoid of teaching any history which would be the necessary background knowledge for future grade levels and can lead to decreased literacy skills. In addition, most of the citizenship standards could be better met in all grade levels by actually teaching history. See below recommendations and research:

1. **History-based curriculum instead of social studies curriculum.** In an article titled, "Dumbing down, PC history U.S. history, critics say", only "11 percent of eighth grades show proficient knowledge of U.S history on standardized tests-down from 17 percent in 2001." (Washington Times, National Weekly Edition, April 5-11, 2004)

The National Council for History Education (NCHE) issued a report on how to improve history education. Excerpts from the report are the following:

Reinvigorating History in U.S. Schools: *Reform Recommendations for the States*

On March 1 and 2, 1996, over 140 NCHE members gathered at the Library of Congress in Washington, DC, to develop strategies for improving history education. Prompted by the dismal results of last November's National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) U.S. History test, the symposium brought together academic and public historians, classroom teachers (elementary, middle, and secondary), school administrators and curriculum specialists, authors and publishers, and museum and historical society personnel.

Designing the History Curriculum: Scope and Sequence

Students will not learn history unless it is taught; therefore NCHE recommends that: States and school districts should require high school graduates to have at least four full years of formal history instruction between grades 7 and 12, and that the K-6 social studies program be history centered.

To accomplish this goal, NCHE further recommends that:

- **At all levels K-12, the social studies curriculum should be history-centered, with geography, economics, and civics incorporated in historical context. Chronology organizes courses and fosters appreciation of patterns, themes, and cause-and-effect in history.**
- **K-12 curricula be unified with genuine, historical themes (e.g. the Bradley Commission's).**
- **At K-3, great stories of history be emphasized (e.g., biographies, historical tales, legends, myths, ballads) and names and places made familiar.**

All of these recommendations are not present in the current draft standards.

In the Educated Child, it states, "The earliest years should introduce exciting highlights of both world and American history...students will return to these subjects for a closer look in the intermediate and junior high grades. For now, the curriculum should pique their interest, focus on key historical issues and begin to give them some points of reference. In these first few years, history should be taught as a great story, with myths, legends, folktales, biographies of famous men and women, and thrilling episodes from the past." (The Educated Child, William Bennet, et al, p. 202)

Currently, U.S. and world history does not begin until fifth grade. Why is this a concern? "Preschools is not too early for starting earnest instruction in literate national culture. Fifth grade is almost too late. Although ...children often show an acceptable ability to decode and pronounce individual words, they are frequently unable to gain an integrated sense of a piece as a whole. They miss central implications and associations because they don't possess the background knowledge to put the text in context." (Cultural Literacy, p. 27)

ED Hirsch also stated that "once basic underlying skills have been automated, the almost universal feature of reliable higher-order thinking about any subject or problem is the possession of a broad, well-integrated base of background knowledge relevant to the subject. (The Schools we need and why we don't have them, p. 152)

In Cultural Literacy by E.D. Hirsch, many scientific experiments are listed. A common conclusion became apparent. It was the "lack of familiarity not only debased the reading rates of our audiences, it also erased the differential effects of good and bad style...This effect was duplicated every time we tested it. We had unwittingly discovered a way to measure the variations in reading skill attributable to variations in the relevant background knowledge of audiences." (p. 44-45) One study compared an essay on Grant and Lee with community college students. The opening words that caused so much trouble were: "When Ulysses S. Grant and Robert E. Lee met in the parlor of a modest house at Appomattox Courthouse, Virginia, on April 9, 1865, to work out the terms for the surrender of Lee's army of Northern Virginia, a great chapter in American life came to a close, and a great new chapter began. These men were bringing the Civil War to its virtual finish." Some of the schematic [background] information needed to read the passage is listed.

1. America fought a Civil War.
2. The two sides were the Union and the Confederacy.
3. Grant was the chief general for the Union.
4. Lee was the chief general for the Confederacy.
5. The Union won.

In the quoted passage, one must integrate the passage on Grant and Lee with schematic background information about what a general is, what Civil War entails, what surrender means, and so on, although one does not pay direct attention to the implications....When we comprehend what we are reading, we are able to supply those implied background relationships.” (p. 53-54)

E.D. Hirsch provides more information of the importance of background knowledge. “Researchers in cognitive psychology and the area of computer science known as artificial intelligence (AI) have come to strikingly similar conclusions about the knowledge-bound character of all cognitive skills. AI research demonstrates that the ability of humans to exercise a skill depends on their possession of specific schemata that are sufficiently numerous and detailed to handle the many varieties of the tasks they are called on to perform. It is more accurate to speak of “reading skills” than of “reading skill.” The graphs showing the community college students’ high degree of skill in reading the essay on friendship but their lack of skill in reading about Grant and Lee accord with the recent discovery of AI and cognitive psychology that a skill is not a unified system of intellectual muscles that can be developed by calisthenics into a vigorous all-purpose ability. Dr. Herbert A. Simon... a Nobel laureate and his colleagues have cast doubt on the idea that there are any general or transferable cognitive skills. All cognitive skills depend on procedural and substantive schemata that are highly specific to the task at hand. Once the relevant knowledge has been acquired, the skill follows.” (Cultural Literacy, p. 60-61)

A study relating to students in the early primary grades demonstrated the following: “...Among seven-year-olds who score the same on reading and IQ tests, those who have greater knowledge relevant to the text at hand show superior reading skills. In one experiment, equally talented second-graders were tested to find out how much they knew about spiders. Those who knew a little about them were much better readers of a story involving spiders than were the other children, even though the story contained no special concepts or difficult words.” (Cultural Literacy, p.47-48)

The proposed draft standards do not provide the background knowledge that is needed to improve the historical knowledge of the Arizona’s children. In addition, this lack of historical knowledge can lead to a decrease in reading comprehension.

In the Educated Child by William Bennett, et al., “The teaching of history is important in the following three broad areas:

1. The Intellectual Function of History-The study of history has the inestimable value of letting us learn from others’ experiences. The recorded past is a vast depository of humanity’s insights, trials, mistakes, and triumphs. By studying history, we can take this rich accumulation of experience and make it part of our own wisdom.
2. The Civic Function of History-In good elementary schools, these [civics] lessons are taught largely in the context of history. A knowledge of the past makes good citizens on several fronts. The Founding Fathers knew well that the health of American democracy would depend on individuals making intelligent decisions...good decisions often require historical intelligence. The study of history...teaches youngsters who we are as a people. [S]tudents gain a basic understanding of the central principles and beliefs that underlie American democracy. Successful elementary schools teach children to *love their country*.
3. The Moral Function of History-The Founders understood that the character of any community ultimately depends on the character of its members...This brings us to the third reason that history lies at the core of the elementary school curriculum: the moral training of the young. The study of the past has long served the function of teaching about right and wrong. ‘For in history you have a record of the infinite variety of human experience plainly set out for all to see,’ wrote the Roman historian Livy, ‘and in that record you can find for yourself and your country both examples and warnings: fine things to take as models, base things, rotten through and through, to avoid.’”

Much of the desired civic knowledge and behavior can be taught and emulated through the teaching of history. History explains the importance of civics. History easily illustrates why civic virtue is needed to maintain our republic and its prosperity.

Geography

1. In the younger grades, there is a need for mastery of geographical facts. The ability to make maps assumes basic information about maps has already been taught. The new standards do not have that content. That information should be taught in K-3.
2. In first grade, the expectation is that students know the terms urbanization and industrialization.
3. The younger grade levels are expected to explain and compare concepts that have not been taught.
4. There is quite a bit of repetition of standards from grade level to grade level.
5. Human –environment interactions is not appropriate for K-3 due to vocabulary and lack of background knowledge
6. In the middle grades, geography information should be correlated with what is being taught in history. "Key concepts of geography, such as location, place, and region are tied inseparably to major ideas of history such as time, period, and events. Geography and history in tandem enable learners to understand how events and places have affected each other across time..." – (Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC), U.S. Department of Education)

"...geography is by nature the constant companion of historical studies; it is hardly possible to grasp the one without the other." (Bradley Commission on History in Schools)

7. Too many standards are related to culture versus the importance of geographical content.
8. High school geography needs actual geography content. Americans are very poor in the knowledge of geography. The emphasis is almost solely human geography.

US students have demonstrated a poor understanding of geography. "Nearly three-quarters of eighth-graders tested below proficient in geography on the 2014 National Assessment of Educational Progress – also known as the Nation's Report Card...A new report from the Government Accountability Office found that more than half of social studies teachers spend 10 percent or less of their time on geography. Social studies is the umbrella subject under which geography is taught, along with things like history, civics and economics.

What's more, a majority of states do not require geography courses in middle school or high school. As of 2013, only 17 states required a geography course in middle school and 10 states required a geography course for students to graduate from high school. (<https://www.usnews.com/news/articles/2015/10/16/us-students-are-terrible-at-geography>)

With the current geography draft standards, Arizona will continue the geographical illiteracy that plagues our country.

Economics

1. In 5.E.7.1 states economic powers outlined in the Constitution. This should be clarified to state Article 1 Section 8.
2. In 6th -12th grades, there is little content related to basic economic principles and great economic thinkers such as Adam Smith. In particular, the definition of particular economic systems such as capitalism, socialism and communism is completely absent.

Civics

1. The K-3 (except for 3.E.1.1) standards are plagued with the same problems as all of the other standards as being developmentally inappropriate. An example is 1.C.1.3 which states that a first

grader must be able to “compare one’s own thoughts and opinions with others’ perspectives.” As proposed earlier that teaching the great stories of history is one of the best ways to teach civics to K-3 students.

2. Classroom rules should not be in state standards. That is a local classroom decision.
3. Standard 4.C2.1 “Use primary and secondary sources to generate questions about the concepts and ideas such as liberty, justice, equality and individual rights. This standard is disturbing because the concepts of liberty, justice, equality and individual rights have been clearly defined by our Founding Fathers and other influential political thinkers such as John Locke. What is the purpose of this standard?”
4. In 5.C2.1, our form of government is defined as a democracy. In the high school standards, our form of government is defined as a constitutional republic, constitutional democracy and republic. This is of grave concern that the writers of these standards do not know what type of government governs the United States. We are a federal republic and Jefferson did state a democratic republic.
5. Sixth, seventh and eighth grade civic standards are mainly social/emotional standards not academic.
6. Bureaucracy is listed with the three branches of government. That is incorrect.
7. What is the meaning of comparative governments? What is political socialization? These are not standards because the definition may be interpreted differently depending on the teacher.

Thomas Jefferson explains it best the importance of civic education. “If a nation expects to be ignorant and free, in a state of civilization, it expects what never was and never will be.” He also stated: “I know of no safe depository of the ultimate powers of the society but the people themselves; and if we think them not enlightened enough to exercise their control with a wholesome direction, the remedy is not to take it from them, but to inform their discretion by education. This is the true corrective of abuses of constitutional power.” The diffusion of knowledge and an enlightened citizenry are essential elements required to maintain liberty.

How should civics be taught in Arizona? Abraham Lincoln gave the answer. “Let it [reverence for the laws and Constitution] be taught in schools, seminaries and in colleges; let it be written in primers, in spelling books and in almanacs; let it be preached from the pulpit, proclaimed in legislative halls, enforced in courts of justice. In short, let it become the political religion of the nation.”

The importance of the study of these four subjects are just as important as reading, writing and math. In preserving our country, I would put forth the idea that these subjects may be even more important for Arizona students to obtain mastery. Unfortunately, the proposed history and social science standards are a huge step backward. My recommendation would be utilize validated and proven standards that help students learn and master the important principles and concepts that need to be taught to prepare them to be citizens of this great country!

From Ben Levandowski, a 7th and 8th grade history teacher:

There is a lot of good in the new social studies standards. I love that they are centered on “Inquiry Elements” which help students think critically about the past. If properly implemented across the grade levels, they will make the study of history in k-12 schools more rigorous. If taught properly, a history curriculum is multi-disciplinary, primary source-based, and incorporates many different perspectives. A properly designed inquiry-based approach does just that. There are, however, larger problems with the study of history in the schools which will lead to unintended negative consequences when these standards are implemented.

First, a bit of background is in order. Some historians see history as a great narrative, with events inexorably leading to other events. Others prefer a thematic or critical approach which seeks to explain events or trends using a particular lens or perspective (economics, gender, diplomatic, etc.). Each side has its adherents and detractors. So-called “popular histories” are published for a broader audience and are often narratives, whereas “academic histories” written for a more select audience typically take the critical or thematic approach. In support of the inquiry process, the standards development committee has framed k-12 social studies not as a great narrative but as a series of discreet topics to be examined separately. The problems start there.

One of the objectives claimed by the standards is to prepare students for “college-entry courses” (sic), but the structure of the standards appears to subvert this goal in an important way. Colleges and universities typically offer to incoming freshmen introductory “survey” courses in history which are designed to prepare them for higher-level content. Upper-division courses usually dive more deeply into the material through a critical lens. These upper-level courses require students to have a firm grasp of historical context to conduct thorough, rigorous analysis. Critically, unlike the draft standards which jump right to thematic, topical analysis, colleges recognize that students must understand the broad strokes before they take a deep dive into topics. Perhaps if we were better at giving students a comprehensive understanding of broad historical narratives at the k-12 level, colleges would not need to offer introductory historical survey courses to incoming freshmen.

Taken together, the layout of the standards sets our students up for historical illiteracy despite the best efforts of our dedicated teachers.

1) Local educational agencies are given too much latitude to choose topics of study. Many grade-level standards are accompanied by the notice: “Understanding time constraints, LEAs should select a manageable amount of content to support the inquiry process to educate students.” This short-changes students who will be sent to the next grade level without an adequate foundation to understand subsequent topics. If a student is not given thorough exposure to the ideas of the American Revolution, he or she will be lost in eighth grade when asked to study civics. Furthermore, this “pick-and-choose” approach invites the introduction of implicit bias into classrooms. Instructors will focus on events and interpretations which they consider important while excluding other material. Many teachers studiously avoid this but some will not.

2) As admitted in the standards, there are too many topics at each particular grade level to cover effectively. Seventh grade social studies teachers must usher students through 400+ years of world history, precluding a comprehensive understanding of history as a whole.

3) Eschewing a coherent presentation of history in the schools, the standards instead see the subject subordinate or a vehicle to “support” the inquiry process. In short, history is a means to an end rather than an end in-and-of itself. The explanatory notes accompanying the standards are explicit and direct: social studies is to be subordinated and made an adjunct to teaching of the English language arts standards.

4) The standards will further the damaging trend in many self-contained primary classrooms of focusing on “tested” subjects to the detriment of social studies. The deliberate muddying of the waters between social studies and ELA skills will lead to a marginalization of social studies. Accordingly, students will arrive to departmentalized classes in middle and high school with huge skills gaps. This will necessitate time-consuming and complex formative assessment and re-teaching of prerequisite concepts; not all teachers will be able to do this, and students will be the ones to pay the price.

5) Gaps in historical understanding. The old standards used spiraling to teach concepts at grade-appropriate levels of complexity. However, lack of coordination between grade-level teams led to poor execution of the old standards; students complained of repetitive coverage across the grade levels. The draft standards resolve this problem by avoiding repetition of topics across grade levels, but open us up to a new problem: gaps. If a fifth grade teacher fails to teach the American Revolution, the Constitution, the Civil War, or Reconstruction, all of the students in that class will have to wait until high school to see those topics again. Worse, these students will sit through civics in eighth grade without being able to summon appropriate historical context.

6) Jumping from topic to topic will lead students to see history as an incomprehensible, interminable litany of dates, people, ideas, and events which bear no relation to other events or themselves. Putting aside the fact that the coverage included in the draft standards is optional and at the discretion of LEAs, the standards separate topics which should be taught concurrently to build nuanced understanding. Colonial America is taught in fourth grade and the Revolution is taught in fifth grade. The Cold War is taught in seventh grade and the Civil Rights Movement is taught in eighth grade. The Vietnam War is taught in seventh grade and modern U.S. political history is *never* taught. World War Two is taught in seventh grade, while the Holocaust is taught in eighth grade.

Rather than teaching the true complexity of social studies, the standards foster apathy and ignorance; events simply *happen*, and facile explanations stand in where more complex ones are due. Why did the Holocaust happen? Not because of popular anger over the Treaty of Versailles, scapegoating of Jews by craven politicians in response to economic difficulties, or an absurd linkage of Jews with communism. Teaching the Holocaust in isolation deprives students of the opportunity to connect the dots and leads them, bewildered, to conclude that Hitler was simply crazy or evil. Teaching social studies without a strong foundation in history promotes simplistic, low-level thinking and fosters ignorance about the past and present.

Sadly, the draft standards will bring about the very thing they were trying to avoid: the marginalization of social studies teaching in the schools. The subtext underlying the draft standards seems to be “if our subject helps us pass our standardized tests, it will be relevant.” The inquiry model and connections to ELA skills are potentially valuable areas for cross-curricular collaboration between ELA and social studies

teachers. However, by failing to ensure that students are able to draw on a robust understanding of a broad historical narrative, history is made to be little more than background noise, a second fiddle to the larger curriculum.