



BENCHMARKING CIVICS INSTRUCTION

August 2023

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INTRODUCTION

A Hanover Research (Hanover) partner has spent the last two years evaluating its core curricular subjects: RELA, math, and science. Now, the partner needs to evaluate its social studies curriculum and support its social studies teachers. As the recent political climate has led to prioritization and discussion of civics education, many states and school districts across the country have revised standards and curricula for social studies and civics content. The partner is interested in how other districts have handled civics instruction in light of the current political climate.

To support that work, the district has partnered with Hanover to conduct a benchmarking report examining how districts approach civics instruction within the social studies curriculum. This report will be used by district leadership to determine potential changes to how civics is incorporated into their K-12 social studies curriculum. In addition to the methodology, this report includes one section which presents overall state trends as well as state and school district profiles around civics education.

METHODOLOGY

Hanover reviewed recent state legislation and policy papers from professional education organizations to identify states and districts with recent changes to social studies standards and curriculum, with a particular focus on civics education in grades K-12. Hanover also used targeted search terms to identify recent news articles discussing social studies and civics curriculum changes across states and school districts. Using news articles and publicly available information on state department of education and district websites, Hanover identified six states to benchmark. For each profile, Hanover includes an overview of the state policies and recent revisions on civics instruction and then spotlights one or more school districts within the state.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on our findings, Hanover suggests that districts consider the following recommendations.



Gather sufficient community input when reviewing new social studies and civics requirements or curricula to ensure buy-in from the school community. Specifically, district leaders and school board members should facilitate accessible forms of community engagement by leveraging multiple types of communication. For example, districts can hold in-person or virtual meetings, send out surveys, and hold workshops for the community to review materials and get questions answered. Engagement should reach all members of the school community, including educators, families, students, and the public.



Identify opportunities to incorporate civics instruction into middle and elementary school curricula through changes to course sequencing or action civics strategies. Elementary schools can incorporate civics-focused units within social studies content, and middle schools can develop more formalized civics units or dedicated courses. Action civics, which encourages student-led community engagement or service learning (e.g., advocacy, public deliberation, voting), is an increasingly common strategy to introduce middle school students to civics.



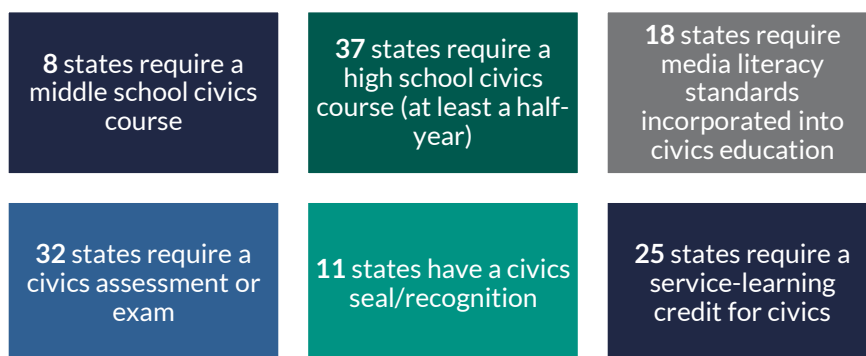
Consider conducting additional research on Critical Race Theory and other highly politicized topics (e.g., the inclusion of LGBTQ+ issues in the curriculum) related to social studies and civics curriculum to support the district's ability to navigate conversations around these topics with the community. Additional research can support curriculum and instruction teams in creating a culturally responsive curriculum that balances and addresses varying perspectives and concerns.

KEY FINDINGS



Civics education has been growing across the U.S., but states take different approaches to encouraging civics learning in school, including requirements for civics courses, assessments, service-learning projects, and media literacy standards. Over recent years, states have been reviewing social studies and civics standards across K-12 and passing new legislation that increases the rigor of requirements. Specific trends across state requirements are summarized in Figure ES 1.

Figure ES 1: Civics Education Requirements: Trends Across States



Most states have updated social studies and civics standards to be more culturally responsive and inclusive of diverse cultural and social contributions present throughout history. Specifically, many state changes require that curriculum includes diverse texts and topics that demonstrate the experiences of diverse people. Common groups of diverse people that are cited by states include African American, Latino, American Indian, Asian American, people with disabilities, and LGBTQ+ groups. These requirements have led to numerous discussions regarding Critical Race Theory in school districts and whether to incorporate associated concepts into teaching. For example, at Cherry Creek School District in Colorado, the school board had several discussions with the public and district leaders. At these meetings, the district stated that Critical Race Theory is not a curriculum, but teachers may choose to use supplemental materials that pull from this theory.



Over recent years, there has been an increase in middle school civics education at the state and district level. Several states have introduced new civics courses for middle schools or adjusted standards to place a greater emphasis on civics topics and skills in earlier grades. For example, the District of Columbia (DC) recently developed new standards and adjusted its K-12 curriculum to include a civics course in Grade 8. This “Action Civics” course replaces the previous Grade 8 social studies course on world history and geography; however, the previous topics are covered in other courses throughout the curriculum. Florida has historically prioritized civics education, passing a law in 2010 that required a middle school course on civics, and the state continues to grow civics instruction.



Some states or districts adopted standards and curricula to introduce more civics topics at elementary schools. However, there has been less of an emphasis on adjusting the elementary social studies curriculum compared to the secondary curriculum. At the elementary level, civics topics are much broader and integrated throughout existing chapters or units. There is also more controversy about whether topics are age-appropriate at the elementary school level. For example, Temecula Valley Unified School District in California faced community pushback over the adoption of a new elementary curriculum for social studies. This curriculum was approved by the California Department of Education, but some school board members and parents felt that one

chapter in the curriculum discussing gay rights activism and court cases were “sexualized issues” and therefore not appropriate for that age level. In response to this opposition, the school adopted the curriculum except for this chapter and is seeking out an alternative resource to use in its place.



To gain buy-in, states and school districts gathered sufficient community feedback to increase understanding and address concerns regarding the social studies curriculum. Before adopting new standards or curricular resources, both states and school districts convene a working group of educators, content experts, and leaders to review and evaluate options. This process includes sharing recommendations or curriculum materials with the public and gathering feedback through surveys, meetings, or other forms of communication. Based on the education agencies benchmarked in this report, a lack of family and community input often leads to more controversy and pushback regarding new curricula or standards. For example, parents and students at Woodland Park School District in Colorado felt that they were left out of the decision-making process for new social studies standards which led to more community tension.



Since many states and districts are increasing the amount of civics education, they are adjusting other courses to incorporate new content. Most states that added a new civics course, or increased the amount of civics content, changed course sequencing. In particular, some districts replaced world history or geography courses with civics courses but maintained some of the previous content within the same course or in other courses. Another approach to increasing civic education is through service-learning or student-led civics projects and engagement. For example, Massachusetts passed legislation requiring that every middle school and high school include at least one student-led civics project aligned to “action civics,” which involves engagement in local civics to address a community issue.

SECTION I: CIVICS EDUCATION ACROSS STATES AND DISTRICTS

In the following section, Hanover describes the current trends across the United States for social studies curricula in public schools, with a particular focus on civics education. This section presents general requirements across all states and then highlights several states and school districts that recently navigated or are currently navigating changes to social studies or civics curriculum. The profiles are listed in alphabetical order by state.

STATE TRENDS

Civics education has become a trending topic among education policymakers and leaders over the past few years and with ongoing debates over how to teach history and the impact of Critical Race Theory. Many states passed legislation on civics education or social studies and history standards for school districts. States are encouraging civics learning, engagement, and action through new standards, course requirements, assessments, or project work. Although civics education is growing across the U.S., states have taken different approaches to support efforts.¹ Some states have introduced new courses at the middle school level or adopted service-learning requirements for students. Other states have strengthened content standards or adjusted curricula to reflect the inclusion of diverse social and cultural experiences throughout history.² Figure 1.1 summarizes general requirements for civics education across each state, and Figure 1.2 presents a map that indicates which states require stand-alone civics courses at the high school and middle school levels.

Figure 1.1: Civic Education Requirement Across States

| STATE | MIDDLE SCHOOL COURSE | HIGH SCHOOL COURSE | MEDIA LITERACY STANDARDS | CIVICS ASSESSMENT | CIVICS SEAL/SCHOOL RECOGNITION | SERVICE-LEARNING CREDIT |
|----------------------|----------------------|--------------------|--------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Alabama | ☑ | ☑ | | ☑ | | |
| Alaska | | | ☑ | | | |
| Arizona | | ☑ | ☑ | ☑ | ☑ | |
| Arkansas | | ☑ | ☑ | ☑ | | ☑ |
| California | | ☑ | | | ☑ | |
| Colorado | | ☑ | ☑ | | | |
| Connecticut | | ☑ | ☑ | | ☑ | ☑ |
| Delaware | | | | ☑ | | ☑ |
| District of Columbia | ☑ | ☑ | ☑ | | | ☑ |
| Florida | ☑ | ☑ | ☑ | ☑ | | ☑ |

¹ Thompson, C. "State Support for Civic Engagement." Learning Policy Institute, May 3, 2023.

<https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/state-support-civic-engagement-report>

² Healy, S. "How States Can Strengthen K-12 Civics Education." Education Commission of the States, July 22, 2022.

<https://ednote.ecs.org/how-states-can-strengthen-k-12-civics-education/>

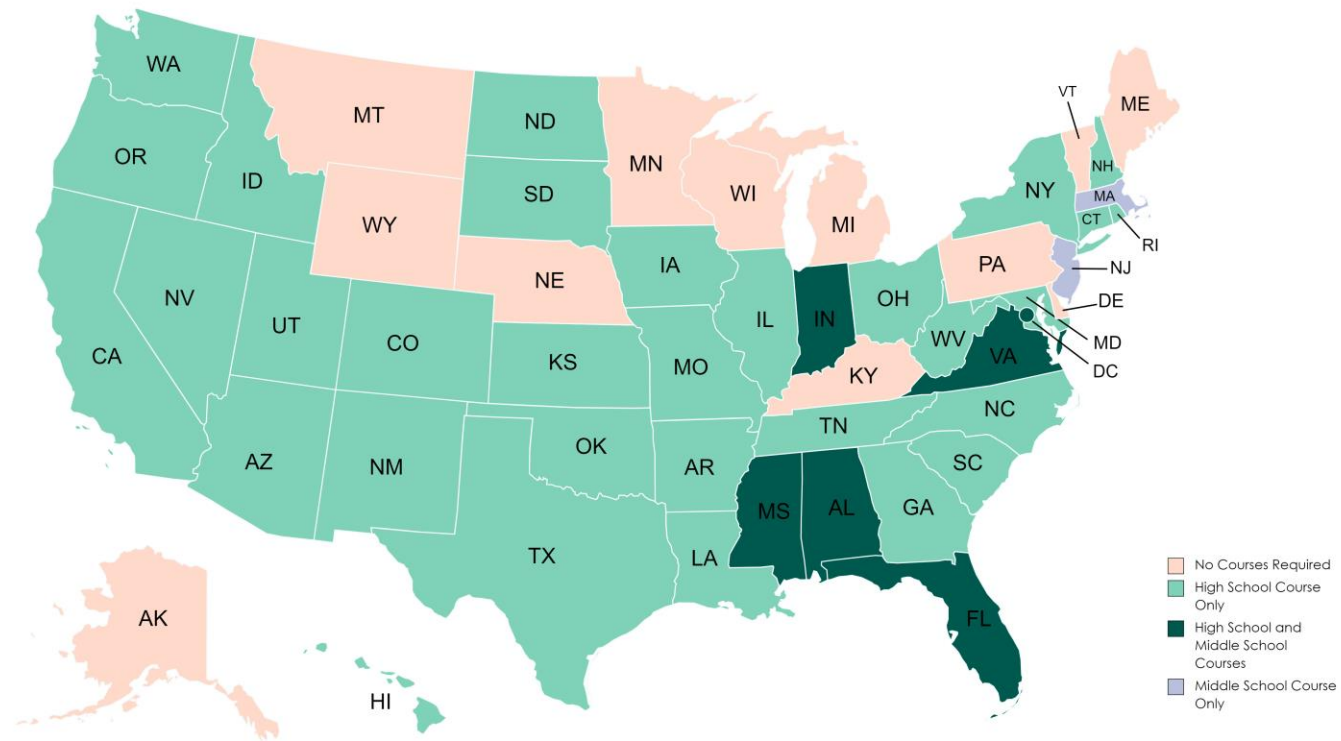
| STATE | MIDDLE SCHOOL COURSE | HIGH SCHOOL COURSE | MEDIA LITERACY STANDARDS | CIVICS ASSESSMENT | CIVICS SEAL/SCHOOL RECOGNITION | SERVICE-LEARNING CREDIT |
|----------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Georgia | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Hawaii | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | | | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Idaho | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | | |
| Illinois | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Indiana | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Iowa | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | | | | |
| Kansas | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | |
| Kentucky | | | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | | |
| Louisiana | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | | |
| Maine | | | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | | |
| Maryland | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Massachusetts | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | | |
| Michigan | | | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | | |
| Minnesota | | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Mississippi | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | | | | |
| Missouri | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Montana | | | | | | |
| Nebraska | | | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | | |
| Nevada | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| New Hampshire | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| New Jersey | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| New Mexico | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| New York | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | |
| North Carolina | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | | | | |
| North Dakota | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Ohio | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |

| STATE | MIDDLE SCHOOL COURSE | HIGH SCHOOL COURSE | MEDIA LITERACY STANDARDS | CIVICS ASSESSMENT | CIVICS SEAL/SCHOOL RECOGNITION | SERVICE-LEARNING CREDIT |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Oklahoma | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Oregon | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | | | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Pennsylvania | | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | |
| Rhode Island | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | | |
| South Carolina | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | | |
| South Dakota | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | | | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Tennessee | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Texas | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Utah | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | | |
| Vermont | | | | | | |
| Virginia | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Implemented soon | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | |
| Washington | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| West Virginia | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Wisconsin | | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | | |
| Wyoming | | | | | | |
| Total number of states: | 8 | 37 | 18 | 32 | 11 | 25 |

Source: Governing the Future of States and Localities³

³ Figure content adapted from: Smith, C. "Civic Education Is Having a Moment. This Is What That Means." Governing the Future of States and Localities, March 3, 2023. <https://www.governing.com/now/civic-education-is-having-a-moment-this-is-what-that-means>

Figure 1.2 Civics Course Requirements by State



Created with mapchart.net

Source: Governing the Future of States and Localities⁴

⁴ Figure information taken from: Ibid.

CALIFORNIA

The California Department of Education (CDE) last updated its [History-Social Science Framework](https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/hs/cf/hssframework.asp) in 2016 and released a list of materials and programs for different grade levels that align with these standards.⁵ The framework includes a half-year course on “Principles of American Democracy” which covers civics education. The framework also includes a section on civic engagement and service-learning projects. Additionally, **the framework outlines a chapter on “Access and Equity” which discusses teaching social studies with culturally responsive teaching principles.**⁶

TEMECULA VALLEY UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

Temecula Valley Unified School District (TVUSD) recently (i.e., Summer 2023) deliberated the adoption of a new social studies curriculum for elementary students to comply with the FAIR Education Act, which requires that “school districts teach the achievements of the state’s racial and ethnic groups, people with disabilities, and LGBTQ Californians.”⁷ The curriculum that the district considered and ultimately decided to adopt after three school board votes is the “Social Studies Alive!” series. This curriculum is one of the four approved programs by the CDE. However, the school board expressed concerns about one chapter in the fourth-grade textbook. This chapter called, [“California’s Promise,”](#) discusses California’s cultural contributions and civil rights including three paragraphs about gay rights activism through court cases and protests.⁸ Similarly, board members expressed reservations about supplementary materials that mention the gay activist Harvey Milk, though he does not appear in the textbook. These concerned members cited that there were “sexualized issues” in the curriculum that are not appropriate for elementary students.⁹

Many teachers across the district piloted the program and associated materials from Social Studies Alive! and shared positive reviews of the curriculum as well as positive reactions from students. To address some of the issues with supplemental materials, the board considered adopting the textbook but not accompanying resources. However, teachers reported that these resources were critical to the needs of English learners and students with disabilities and must be included in the adoption.¹⁰

Board members who pushed back against the curriculum also cited the lack of parental input. However, officials reported that the district and all 18 school sites attempted to gather feedback from parents with a survey but less than a dozen filled it out.¹¹

The school board voted to adopt the new program for elementary social studies, but the chapter “California’s Promise” would be excluded, leaving administrators to come up with an alternative curriculum for the chapter later in the school year. The school board president also stated that they would develop a complaint process for parents to raise objections to content and provide the board with the authority to decide whether content is age appropriate.¹²

⁵ “History-Social Science Framework.” California Department of Education, October 5, 2022. <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/hs/cf/hssframework.asp>

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Lambert, D., J. Fensterwald, and M. Seshadri. “Temecula Valley Unified Reverses Course and Adopts State-Approved Social Studies Curriculum.” EdSource, July 22, 2023. <https://edsource.org/2023/temecula-valley-unified-reverses-course-and-adopts-controversial-social-studies-curriculum/694593>

⁸ “California’s Cultural Contributions.” Teachers’ Curriculum Institute, 2023. pp. 1–35. https://edsource.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/lesson_2033_california_s_cultural_contributions.pdf

⁹ Lambert, Fensterwald, and Seshadri, Op. cit.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Juarez, L. “Temecula Valley School Board Votes 3-2 to Reject New Curriculum over Harvey Milk Inclusion.” ABC7 Los Angeles, June 1, 2023. <https://abc7.com/temecula-valley-harvey-milk-school-board-curriculum/13330213/>

¹² Lambert, Fensterwald, and Seshadri, Op. cit.

COLORADO

The Colorado Department of Education revises its academic standards every six years and recently updated its social studies standards to align with new state laws. These laws emphasize the inclusion of topics outlined in Figure 1.3. Although the state laws encouraged a particular approach to the curriculum, the Colorado committee faced political challenges and controversy. Specifically, in response to revising the standards, there was an attempt to instead adopt the conservative American Birthright social studies standards. However, the state board voted four to three to reject American Birthright standards.¹³

Figure 1.3: Requirements for New Social Studies Curriculum



Source: Colorado Public Radio¹⁴

The Colorado Department of Education's [2022 recommendations](#) were released to the public for feedback before the standards were officially updated.¹⁵ **The most controversy around these recommendations was related to standards that required the inclusion of “history, cultures, and social contributions of diverse peoples.** State laws specifically referenced African American, Latino, American Indian, Asian American, and LGBTQ groups. Based on the feedback, the committee reduced the explicit references to these groups and limited the discussion of LGBTQ topics in elementary grades due to “age appropriateness.”¹⁶ The standards that were officially adopted in 2022 are outlined in [this document](#).¹⁷ Notably, these standards encourage civic topics and concepts through all grade levels although students must complete a high school-level civics and government course to graduate.¹⁸

CHERRY CREEK SCHOOL DISTRICT

Cherry Creek School District (Cherry Creek) reported the adoption of new curricular resources for social studies to align with the new state standards. The new resource is called Inquiry Journeys and will be used in all K-5 and Grade 7 classrooms. Figure 1.4 presents the key features of this resource.¹⁹

¹³ Brundin, J. “In a Divided Vote, Colorado’s State Board of Education Approves New Inclusive Social Studies Standards after a Tumultuous Year-Long Debate.” Colorado Public Radio, November 10, 2022. <https://www.cpr.org/2022/11/10/colorado-state-board-of-education-approves-new-inclusive-social-studies-standards/>

¹⁴ Figure information taken verbatim from: Ibid.

¹⁵ “Social Studies Summary of Changes 2022.” Colorado Department of Education, 2022. <https://www.cde.state.co.us/standardsandinstruction/ss2022stdssummary>

¹⁶ Brundin, “In a Divided Vote, Colorado’s State Board of Education Approves New Inclusive Social Studies Standards after a Tumultuous Year-Long Debate,” Op. cit.

¹⁷ Hurd, S. et al. “Colorado Academic Standards Social Studies.” Colorado Department of Education, 2023. pp. 1–145. <https://www.cde.state.co.us/cosocialstudies/cas-ss-p12-2022>

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ “Curricular Resources: Inquiry Journeys.” Cherry Creek Schools, March 31, 2023. <https://www.cherrycreekschools.org/Page/13958>

Figure 1.4: Features of the Inquiry Journeys Resource

Inquiry based instruction - promotes student-centered investigation by building knowledge in History, Civics, Geography, and Economics through investigation and action

Supports culturally responsive education - teaching strategies support student voice and choice and connect to students' experiences and interests

Utilizes standards-based instruction and assessment - aligns to Colorado social studies and Common Core ELA

Connects to high quality diverse sources- provides accurate and authentic sources that originate from diverse authors and creators

Provides teacher-ready tools - offers fully digital, customizable units and ready-to-use sources, strategies, and tools.

Source: Cherry Creek Schools²⁰

Before adopting new resources and curriculum for social studies, the school district held public meetings to discuss these changes and had a notable meeting that discussed the topic of Critical Race Theory and its use in the district's curriculum. The discussion of Critical Race Theory was in response to the Colorado legislation requiring teachings about the historical contributions of minorities and consideration of issues minorities have faced over time. After the school board recommended and presented the Inquiry Journeys program to support culturally responsive education, school community members discussed its potential impact. Many members of the public supported this new adoption and its alignment with the community's equity work. However, some commenters felt that this adoption indicated the school was teaching Critical Race Theory and believed it would turn people against one another. Although the district did not adopt Critical Race Theory as part of the curriculum, the district's director of curriculum and instruction suggested that educators could still utilize pieces of the theory in their lessons.²¹

Cherry Creek requires three credits of social studies for students to graduate high school which must include one credit of U.S. History and a half credit of Civics/Government.²² The district's social studies department describes how the curriculum connects to literacy standards for English Language Arts by emphasizing students' ability to cite textual evidence, understand disciplinary vocabulary, distinguish fact from opinion, identify competing or alternating claims, and narrate historical events. The department's description of civics is highlighted below:²³

CIVICS



*"Civics teaches the complexity of the origins, structure, and functions of governments; the rights, roles, and responsibilities of ethical citizenship; the importance of law; and the skills necessary to participate in all levels of government. Civics instruction calls for students to learn how to use deliberative processes and follow rules and laws to take informed action in response to real-world problems."*²⁴

²⁰ Figure information taken verbatim from: Ibid.

²¹ Arnold, E. "Critical Race Theory Debated at Cherry Creek School Board Meeting: Dozens Spoke in Hours-Long Public Comment Period; District Talks Curriculum." Centennial Citizen Independent, July 2, 2021.
<https://centennialcitizen.net/stories/critical-race-theory-debate-arises-at-cherry-creek-meeting,379051>

²² "College and Career: Graduation Requirements." Cherry Creek Schools.
<https://www.cherrycreekschools.org/Page/http%3A%2F%2Fwww.cherrycreekschools.org%2Fsite%2Fdefault.aspx%3FPageID%3D4122>

²³ "Social Studies What We Believe." Cherry Creek Schools, November 19, 2021.
<https://www.cherrycreekschools.org/Page/2926>

²⁴ Ibid.

DENVER PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Denver Public Schools (DPS) announced new graduation requirements that reflect Colorado's new social studies standards. Specifically, DPS added a new personal finance course and two history courses that focus on the Holocaust and genocide education requirement. **DPS plans to incorporate the standards into the Grade 9 curriculum through Introduction to Ethnic Studies and The History of Power, Conflict, and Healing.** These two courses will replace previous geography and world history courses. Although these are new courses, they will still include content from world history but provide an emphasis on the Holocaust and other genocides.²⁵ DPS also describes its new graduation requirements on the [district website](#).²⁶

WOODLAND PARK SCHOOL DISTRICT

Woodland Park School District (Woodland) adopted the American Birthright Standards as part of their social studies curriculum but also relies on other standards to cover topics like financial literacy and the history of the Holocaust.²⁷ Although the district does not rely solely on the American Birthright Standards, this set of standards created by the [Civics Alliance](#) was rejected by the Colorado State Board of Education.²⁸ The school board and interim superintendent felt the American Birthright Standards were better aligned with the district's purpose and core beliefs. However, this adoption led to pushback from some families and students as they felt that they were left out of the decision-making process. Many parent concerns were not addressed by the school board and student protests were dismissed in the decision process.²⁹ According to the [2023-2024 course description guide](#), Woodland requires a semester-long civics course (0.5 credits) that aligns with the standards from the Civics Alliance.³⁰

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

District of Columbia State Board of Education (DC SBOE) recently confirmed the adoption of new social studies standards across all grade levels. Since D.C. does not have legislation mandating regular updates to curriculum standards, board members and district leaders must initiate the process. In 2019, the school board started discussing the need for new social studies standards and began writing [guidelines](#) in 2020 in collaboration with a 32-member team of educators, and experts in history, social studies, and civics.³¹



*"The District's State Board of Education has adopted new social studies standards that **focus on the experiences of people of color, D.C. history, and media literacy** – marking the first revision to what students learn on the subject in 17 years."*³²

²⁵ "DPS to Announce New Graduation Requirements Including Focus on Genocide Education." KUSA.Com, February 6, 2023. <https://www.9news.com/article/news/education/dps-graduation-requirements-new/73-6b0ef292-f21f-42cf-8bd0-8948c2dd0af3>

²⁶ "Graduation Requirements." Denver Public Schools, 2023. <https://collegeandcareer.dpsk12.org/gradrequirements/>

²⁷ "Information on the American Birthright Standard." Woodland Park School District, 2023. <https://wpsdk12.org/information-on-the-american-birthright-standard>

²⁸ [1] "American Birthright: The Civics Alliance's Model K-12 Social Studies Standards." Civics Alliance. <https://civicsalliance.org/american-birthright/> [2] Brundin, J. "Woodland Park School District Adopts Conservative American Birthright Social Studies Standards after the State Board Rejected Them." Colorado Public Radio, January 12, 2023. <https://www.cpr.org/2023/01/12/woodland-park-school-district-american-birthright-social-studies-standards/>

²⁹ Brundin, "Woodland Park School District Adopts Conservative American Birthright Social Studies Standards after the State Board Rejected Them," Op. cit.

³⁰ "Course Description Guide 2023-2024." Woodland Park School District, 2023. https://docs.google.com/document/d/1PvvSyJOqY75VKM9PnkpXgHM3gkldaLxOYFafVi4kdQ/edit?usp=sharing&usp=embed_facebook

³¹ [1] Lumpkin, L. "D.C. Schools Adopts New Social Studies Standards for First Time since 2006." *Washington Post*, June 22, 2023. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2023/06/21/dc-schools-social-studies-standards/> [2] "Social Studies Standards Guiding Principles." District of Columbia State Board of Education, December 16, 2020. <https://sboe.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/sboe/publication/attachments/2020-12-16-FINAL-SSSAC-Guiding-Principles.pdf>

³² Lumpkin, Op. cit.

Officials and board members encouraged feedback from community members, which led to several changes and updates prior to implementation. For example, public comments praised the inclusion of digital and media literacy but advocated for additional representation of Black, Indigenous, and LGBTQ+ people. Another update based on feedback was including Grade 3 standards that describe the relationship between slavery and various D.C. institutions (e.g., White House, U.S. Capitol, Georgetown University).³³

D.C. plans to fully implement the standards by the 2025-2026 school year. Decisionmakers feel these new standards accurately reflect the history of the U.S. and D.C. These standards include a more direct examination of racism and white supremacy. The standards also increase the rigor of expectations for students at earlier grades, such as positioning lessons about ancient history in Grade 2 rather than Grade 7. Another change is the addition of an “Action Civics” course for Grade 8 students to learn democratic principles and civic engagement. Similarly, the new curriculum will teach students how to critique sources and identify misinformation, which is critical to civic engagement.³⁴ Figure 1.5 highlights the specific shifts in courses across grade levels for the [new standards](#).³⁵

Figure 1.5: Course Shifts for New Social Studies Standards

| | | | |
|----------------|---|---|--|
| Grade 2 | Living, Learning, and Working Now and Long Ago | → | Ancient Civilizations |
| Grade 4 | U.S. History and Geography: Making a New Nation | → | American Foundations—First Nations through the Founding of the United States |
| Grade 5 | U.S. History and Geography: Westward Expansion to the Present | → | Foundations of Modern America |
| Grade 6 | World Geography and Cultures | → | World Geography |
| Grade 7 | World History and Geography: Ancient World | → | U.S. History I: First Nations—Reconstruction |
| Grade 8 | U.S. History and Geography I: Growth and Conflict | → | Action Civics |

Source: Office of the State Superintendent of D.C.³⁶

FLORIDA

Florida has historically prioritized civics education and developed a cohesive approach through specified courses and assessments. In 2010, a law required the introduction of a middle school course and an

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ [1] “Washington, DC K-12 Social Studies Standards Revised Standards.” Office of the State Superintendent of Education D.C., March 2023. pp. 1–141. https://osse.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/osse/page_content/attachments/FINAL_DRAFT_3.16.23%20OSSE%20social%20studies%20standards%20SBOE%20revisions%20CLEAN%20COPY.pdf [2] “Social Studies.” Office of the State Superintendent of Education D.C. <https://osse.dc.gov/page/social-studies-0>

³⁶ Figure information taken verbatim from: “Social Studies,” Op. cit.

assessment to measure students' knowledge, making up about one-third of each student's grade in that subject.³⁷ This middle school civics course covers four main topics, as follows:³⁸

- Origins and purposes of laws and governments;
- Citizens' rights and responsibilities;
- The political process; and
- The organization and function of government.

Florida is one of the eight states that have a formalized civics course for middle school as most other states have a formal civics curriculum in high school. The Lou Frey Institute at the University of Central Florida supported this change through materials and professional development for educators.³⁹

In 2019, Florida passed a new law requiring the revision of K-12 social studies and civic standards, which were fully revised in 2021 and set to be adopted in the 2023-2024 year. The revisions emphasize patriotism and American exceptionalism and have influenced the creation of the Civics Alliance's national standards.⁴⁰ The new standards are linked below:



[K-12 Social Studies Standards⁴¹](#)



[K-12 Civics and Government Standards⁴²](#)

MIAMI-DADE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Miami-Dade County Public Schools (M-DCPS) demonstrates some of the implementation barriers as well as successes from the shift to a new social studies curriculum. Following the requirement to introduce a new middle school civics course, the district struggled to adjust the pacing of the curriculum to meet the new course content requirements. However, the district devoted two staff positions to civics to provide in-school support for educators and used the assessment data to target lower-performing schools.⁴³ Currently, the district's social studies department has a [page](#) on resources for civics support including best practices and instructional tools and data assessment resources.⁴⁴

In response to the revisions to the K-12 social studies standards, M-DCPS is in the process of adopting new social studies materials and curricula. **M-DCPS established a District Instructional Review Committee which will lead the review process and present a recommendation for adoption.** The committee is reviewing and

³⁷ Sawchuk, S. "How 3 States Are Digging In on Civics Education." Education Week, June 27, 2019. <https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/how-3-states-are-digging-in-on-civics-education>

³⁸ Bulleted text quoted verbatim from: Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Najarro, I. "Revamped Florida Civics Education Aims for 'Patriotism.' Will It Catch On Elsewhere?" Education Week, July 12, 2022. <https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/revamped-florida-civics-education-aims-for-patriotism-will-it-catch-on-elsewhere/2022/07>

⁴¹ "Florida's State Academic Standards - Social Studies, 2023." Florida Department of Education, 2023. pp. 1–216. <https://www.fldoe.org/core/fileparse.php/20653/urlt/6-4.pdf>

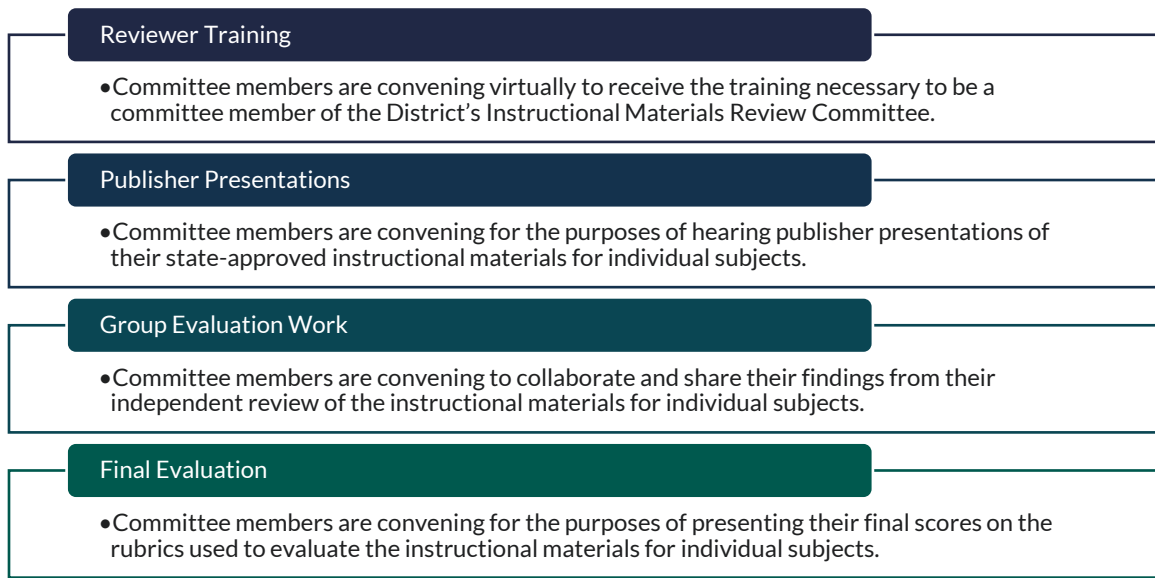
⁴² "Proposed K-12 Civics and Government Standards." Florida Department of Education, 2023. pp. 1–21. <https://www.fldoe.org/core/fileparse.php/18736/urlt/CivicsGovernment.pdf>

⁴³ Sawchuk, "How 3 States Are Digging In on Civics Education," Op. cit.

⁴⁴ "Civics Support." Miami-Dade County Public Schools, 2023. <http://socialsciences.dadeschools.net/#/rightColumn/2367>

identifying materials for the social studies curriculum across all grade levels.⁴⁵ The adoption process is outlined in the district's Instructional Materials, School Library/Media Center, and Other Educational Materials [Board policy 2510](#), which was last updated in 2022. The district created a [webpage](#) for school community members to check updates on the adoption process and encourage engagement and feedback.⁴⁶ Specifically, committee meetings (see Figure 1.6) are open to the public so interested individuals can follow the process.

Figure 1.6: District Instructional Review Committee Meetings



Source: Innovation and School Choice Miami-Dade County Public Schools⁴⁷

MASSACHUSETTS

IN 2018, Massachusetts legislators approved a bill for civics education which made the state the first to require schools to coordinate student-led civics projects.⁴⁸ Specifically, **each middle and high school must include at least one student-led civics project which aligns with the concept of action civics**—"having students research and use local civics channels to solve problems in their community."⁴⁹ Figure 1.7 outlines the state bill requirements.

⁴⁵ "Social Studies Adoption 2023." Innovation and School Choice Miami-Dade County Public Schools.
<https://innovationschoolchoice.com/social-studies-adoption-2023/>

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Figure information taken verbatim from: Ibid.

⁴⁸ Sawchuk, S. "Civics Education Overhaul Nears Completion in Massachusetts." Education Week, July 26, 2018.
<https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/civics-education-overhaul-nears-completion-in-massachusetts/2018/07>

⁴⁹ Sawchuk, "How 3 States Are Digging In on Civics Education," Op. cit.

Figure 1.7: Massachusetts Civic Education Legislation Requirements

Requires civics to be taught alongside social studies and U.S. history, including lesson on the founding documents and knowing how to analyze written and digital media.

Requires those classes to include the study of voter registration and disenfranchised populations.

Creates a Civics Project Trust Fund to provide professional development on the new requirements and to update the state's history curriculum frameworks.

Creates a Civics Project Trust Fund to provide professional development on the new requirements and to update the state's history curriculum frameworks.

Establishes a high school voter challenge program to boost voter registration in Massachusetts.

Source: Education Week⁵⁰

Since this change focuses on action civics in Grade 8, it required districts to adjust course sequencing. **Many districts in Massachusetts traditionally taught world history in Grade 8 so districts had to make the switch to a civics course instead.**⁵¹ The 2018 History and Social Science Frameworks is available on the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education [website](#), which also highlights that civics education should be culturally responsive.⁵²

BOSTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

When Massachusetts required the new framework adoption for social studies, Boston Public Schools (BPS) communicated this information to the school community on its [website](#).⁵³ BPS highlighted the new full-year civics course for Grade 8 and a new sequence for Grades 6 and 7 as well as how the new standards incorporate diverse perspectives.⁵⁴

To support the new action civics course, including student-led civics projects, BPS created a [civics webpage](#) that outlined its vision for civics education and engagement and a series of resources to support teachers and students in this endeavor.⁵⁵

TEXAS

Texas is one of several states that has experienced delays in its revision process for social studies standards. The state agency debated various decisions related to making social studies more culturally inclusive, but opposition arose from several parent and politically-affiliated groups. Other states, including Louisiana, South Dakota, and Virginia also had delays related to recent efforts to update social studies standards.⁵⁶

⁵⁰ Figure information taken verbatim from: Sawchuk, "Civics Education Overhaul Nears Completion in Massachusetts," Op. cit.

⁵¹ Sawchuk, "How 3 States Are Digging In on Civics Education," Op. cit.

⁵² "Civics," Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, June 30, 2023.
<https://www.doe.mass.edu/instruction/hss/civics/default.html>

⁵³ "2018 History & Social Studies Curriculum Framework." Boston Public Schools.
<https://sites.google.com/a/bostonpublicschools.org/history/curriculum-documents/2018-framework>

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ "BPS CIVICS." Boston Public Schools. <https://sites.google.com/bostonpublicschools.org/bps-civics/home>

⁵⁶ Najarro, I. "Political Debate Upends Texas Social Studies Standards Process." Education Week, September 9, 2022.
<https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/after-political-pressure-texas-delayed-its-social-studies-standards-update/2022/09>

The Texas State Board and the Texas Education Agency (TEA) had been working with educators, subject-matter experts, and community leaders to revise K-12 social studies standards and the framework for two new ethnic studies classes—Asian American and American Indian/Native studies. **The revisions increase teachings about the diverse groups that impacted history.** For example, the revisions proposed that Grade 2 students would learn to “define migration and explain how some migrations are voluntary, and some are forced.”⁵⁷ This is particularly relevant to the state as Texas has one of the highest numbers of refugees resettled in the U.S. and their children attend public schools.⁵⁸

Due to the interference of various groups in opposition to these standards, Texas has delayed its revision process to 2025. These groups were concerned about diminishing Texas values and history through a focus on other topics. Similarly, one group of people opposing the adoption expressed concerns about the inclusion of the LGBTQ+ Pride movement as part of the Grade 8 civil rights movement unit.⁵⁹ The proposed revisions are available [here](#).⁶⁰

FRISCO INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

Although the two new ethnic studies courses—Asian American and American Indian/Native Studies have been delayed for approval, the TEA already had two approved ethnic studies courses available—Mexican American Studies and African American Studies. Frisco Independent School District (FISD) introduced the African American Studies course in the 2021-2022 school year and had more than 270 students enrolled in this social studies elective. The district decided to launch the Mexican American Studies course in the 2022-2023 school year.⁶¹ The district described the value of these courses as follows:



*“The ethnic studies courses further a number of goals of the District, including **promoting respect and understanding of diverse cultures and expanding opportunities for students to ‘see’ themselves in history.**”⁶²*

FISD’s central staff worked with high school sites to identify teachers for the ethnic studies courses and develop a curriculum based on the state TEKS. The district also partnered with regional services centers and surrounding districts that have introduced ethnic studies courses to share ideas for successful implementation.⁶³

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ “Social Studies TEKS Review Work Group Recommendations.” Texas Education Agency, August 2022. pp. 1–59.
<https://tea.texas.gov/academics/curriculum-standards/teks-review/social-studies-teks-review-work-group-f-draft-recommendations-with-intros.pdf>

⁶¹ “FISD Adds Second Ethnic Studies Course.” Frisco ISD, October 13, 2021.
<https://www.friscoisd.org/news/article/2021/10/13/fisd-adds-second-ethnic-studies-course>

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

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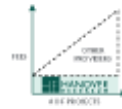
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