

Westwood Public Schools Social Studies Curriculum Review



2012-2013

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Introduction

The Social Studies Curriculum Review Committee met monthly throughout the 2012-2013 school year. The committee was comprised of members from the elementary, middle, and high schools, as listed below:

Administration:

Debra Gallagher, Principal, Downey School
Kyle Grady, Assistant Principal, TMS
Emily Parks, Assistant Superintendent
Katie Ricard, Dean of Students, WHS

Westwood High School:

Ethan Dolleman, Social Studies Teacher
Alison Donahue, Social Studies Teacher
Mary Furber, Social Studies Teacher
Chris Hilton, Social Studies Teacher
Brian McEachern, Social Studies Teacher
Jonas Sherr, Social Studies Teacher

Thurston Middle School

Mark Corbin, Social Studies Teacher
Jo-Ellen Franklin-Briggs, Social Studies Teacher
Andy Frankenfield, Social Studies Teacher
Dan Peppercorn, Social Studies Teacher

Elementary Schools

Barbara Lindsay, Elementary Literacy Coordinator
Julie Krass, Librarian, Deerfield
Sarah Folcram, Grade 3, Sheehan
Stef Carpenter, Grade 1, Sheehan
Sara Giovanangelo, Grade 1, Martha Jones
Chris Layton, Kindergarten, Martha Jones
Stephanie Feuer-Beck, Grade 5, Hanlon
Lindsey Tosches, Grade 4, Deerfield
Ashley Wilson, Grade 4, Martha Jones

The goal of the social studies review was to recommend curriculum and programs that ensure that Westwood students have an engaging, challenging, and rewarding social studies education that reflects the skills and knowledge required of the 21st century learner. Throughout the process, the Committee considered the questions:

- **What is the purpose of social studies education in today's world?**
- **How can we ensure that Westwood's social studies program develops in students the mindset and skills necessary for civic participation in today's world?**

The review of Westwood's program was completed in May 2013 with the development of a revised Mission Statement for the program and the articulation of recommendations to guide future work, both immediately and in the longer term. Findings and recommendations will be reported to Superintendent Antonucci and to the School Committee in June, 2013.

Review Process

During the 2012-2013 school year, the Social Studies Curriculum Review Committee examined Westwood's social studies program and researched best practices in social studies education. The work included:

- A review of the standards established by the Massachusetts Curriculum Framework as well as the literacy standards in the Common Core State Standards
- A review of student program participation, student work, and assessment results
- Research on trends and best practices in social studies education as provided in journals and publications
- Visits to programs in area schools that were identified as employing exemplary social studies practices or innovative programs
- Internal surveys, designed, distributed and analyzed by the committee, to understand student perceptions of the program and perceived needs
- Extensive discussion about our current practices and curriculum implementation

Changes in Social Studies Education Since the Last Review

The Social Studies Review Committee identified 3 significant shifts that have taken place since the last review:

- Ubiquitous access to information and an increased need to be able to critically evaluate that information
- A changing sense of what civic participation means in the era of social media and Web 2.0
- The introduction of new state curriculum frameworks for literacy that include expectations for history/social science

The core mission of social studies education in the United States remains to prepare students to become engaged, effective citizens in our democracy. Since the last review, however, there have been some significant shifts that inform the focus of social studies education. Rapid technological change has significantly impacted the manner in which citizens participate in the civic discourse and the democratic process. With today's ubiquitous access to information, the growth of social media, and an unprecedented ability for every person to publish ideas to a virtually unlimited audience, the power of the individual and the group to participate in the civic discourse has never been so great. With this shift in the very nature of "participation," the need for students to develop the skills to effectively access, analyze and synthesize evidence; assess the credibility of sources; craft a well-founded argument; and develop a mindset grounded in inquiry has become more urgent.

These skills, of course, are at the heart of the how historians and social scientists approach the work of their discipline. The development of these critical skills is also the focus of the 2011 MA Curriculum Literacy Frameworks (often referred to as the Common Core State Standards [CCSS]). Notably, the new state literacy standards explicitly include expectations for history/social science by articulating "anchor standards" for reading, writing, speaking, and listening to be developed in the social studies classroom. The standards for literacy in history/social science focus on critical transferable skills (e.g. engaging with increasingly complex text, synthesizing and evaluating information from multiple sources, constructing evidence-based arguments) that transcend particular content and, in fact, develop the capacity to access content. In this sense, we have become more committed to developing in students the skills and habits of the historian and providing opportunities for students to discover and deeply engage with the important events and themes of history, rather than merely graduate "knowing" about history.

These shifts clearly have implications for curriculum design, instructional strategies, and assessment methods and have informed the recommendations outlined by committee

members in this report. The review process also provided an impetus to reaffirm several long-standing beliefs about the purpose of social studies education: that there are aspects of history that every student should be knowledgeable about, that through the study of history students develop the ability to consider multiple perspectives and an appreciation for human difference, that the study of the past enables meaningful exploration of the present, and that the study of history develops responsible individuals and compassionate community members in a multicultural society. These ideas remain central to the mission.

Mission Statement

The Social Studies curriculum in the Westwood Public Schools provides all students with the opportunity to deeply explore the themes, questions, and events of history in order to connect to the past, understand the present, and shape the future. Through the investigation of rich and varied texts and media, with an emphasis on original sources, we are committed to developing in students the habits of inquiry and critical skills necessary to become engaged, informed, responsible citizens in an increasingly diverse, interconnected, and participatory world.

We cultivate students' ability to:

Formulate, contemplate, and address powerful questions

Research, analyze, and critique rich and varied information, including original sources

Evaluate the perspective and bias of the information available

Engage effectively with unfamiliar texts of increasing complexity

Synthesize varied information to craft a well-founded argument, both in writing and orally

Understand the rights and responsibilities of citizens to participate in our democratic society and contribute to one's community

Connect the events of the past to the present

Understand how geography and environment influence human life

Consider themes common to the human experience, while appreciating and valuing human differences

Overview of the Current Social Studies Program

At the elementary level, social studies instruction takes place during 2-3 hour-long blocks per week taught within students' regular classrooms. The units of study are aligned with the grade-level content prescribed in the Massachusetts curriculum frameworks and follow a developmentally appropriate progression that first examines oneself in relation to family, then local community, and then the larger world. Major topics addressed at each grade include:

Grade	Major themes/topics
K	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● All about me ● Family ● Class and community rules ● School community ● Map of classroom/school ● Town community - Westwood community (helpers, jobs, and services) ● Introduction to money, buying and selling
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● U.S. national holidays ● Patriotic symbols and songs ● Famous Americans ● Neighborhood and town mapping ● World political map features ● Location of town, state, and country on a world map ● Jobs and products
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Personal history timeline ● World geography with an emphasis on continents, oceans, and countries ● World map/geography in context of family origins ● Native Americans - Major tribes of North America
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Columbus and Vikings ● World geography ● Colonization: Roanoke, Jamestown, Plymouth, and the Pilgrims ● Colonial Massachusetts history to 1776 (The Puritans, colonial life, Westwood history, pre-revolution) ● Massachusetts geography ● Economics (barter and trade, natural resources of Massachusetts)
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Geography and natural resources of North America (U.S., Canada and Mexico) ● Regions of the United States ● Building a nation - in context of regions, economics, immigration, westward expansion
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Compare maps of the modern world with historical maps Age of Discovery/exploration and encounters ● Aztecs, Incas, and Mayans ● European settlements in North America: colonization and encounters ● American Revolution ● The Constitution and the formation of the U.S. federal government ● Economics: entrepreneur, profit, supply and demand, import/export, taxation

At Thurston Middle School, all students are enrolled in a social studies courses in grades 6-8 that meet every day, all year long. The department is staffed by 7.2 FTE social studies teachers with class sizes currently ranging from 27 to 12 with an average class size of 19. The grade 6 curriculum focuses on Ancient Civilizations and the development of societies. The 6th grade units of study include Mesopotamia, the Israelites, Egypt, the Empire of Islam, Greece, and Rome. The 7th grade curriculum focuses on “Links and Legacies” specifically the relationship between World History and Geography. Within each unit of study, students learn about the culture, geography and legacy of several time periods. These time periods include Ancient Rome, the Middle Ages, the Silk Road, the Crusades, the Black Death and World Exploration. The 8th grade curriculum is the first time that a Westwood student will experience a course entirely dedicated to United States History. The course is a survey of major milestones in our nation’s history. The units of study include A New Nation (1754-83), The Constitution and the Bill of Rights (1781-91), The Early Years (1788-1820), Expansion, Industrialization and Reform (1816-53), The Civil War (1850-65), Reconstruction (1865-77), WWI, WWII, and the Holocaust (1914-50). In addition to these curricular experiences, students at Thurston can participate in a myriad of different field trips and events. These include a WOSC trip to New York City, a Neolithic Trade Fair and the Greek Olympics.

Social Studies courses at Westwood High School meet full-time (7 days out of the 8-day cycle) for the full year and are staffed by 9.6 FTE teachers. High school students are required to successfully complete at least 10 credits (2 courses) in social studies in order to earn a diploma, including 5 credits in U.S. History. All ninth grade students are enrolled in World Civilizations, a global history course that examines the ancient world through the Renaissance, (level 1, 2, or 3), followed by tenth grade Modern History (level 1, 2, or 3) or AP European History, and U.S. History in grade 11 (level 1, 2, 3, or AP). In their senior year, students may choose from a variety of elective offerings including AP Psychology, Psychology (level 1 or 2), AP US Government, Perspectives on History (level 1 or 2), Legal Studies (level 1 or 2) or Economics and Personal Finance (level 1 or 2). Next year, juniors and seniors may also elect to take a Child Psychology course (level 1 or 2). Students may also receive social studies credit by enrolling in AP Art History through the Art Department.

Despite the fact that only 10 credits in social studies is required for graduation, almost all students at the high school in fact complete 4 years of social studies education, with a small percentage of students who are particularly interested in government/politics or history taking more than one social studies course in their senior year.

Strengths and Recommendations

Through the curriculum review process the committee identified program strengths and articulated recommendations to guide the department's work in several areas:

- A. Program Opportunities and Participation
- B. Curriculum and Instruction
- C. Assessment
- D. Instructional Technology
- E. Professional Development

These findings are outlined below.

Program Opportunities and Participation

Elementary

Strengths:

- Teachers have the flexibility to explore certain topics more deeply
- PTO/PTA sponsors curriculum enrichment opportunities
- Faculty is willing to try new things and collaborate between grade level teachers and among differing grade levels within their own buildings.

Recommendations:

- Hire a Social Studies Coordinator or create an ongoing Social Studies Committee that meets throughout the year to continue work across the district.
- Budget district resources across the grade levels to ensure equitable access to money for new materials after the review process.
- Create a resource with lists of ideas for SS-based field trips and curriculum enrichment programs.
- Coordinate similar field trips and embedded enrichment experiences across the district.
- Include more diverse perspectives
- Survey teachers to make sure everyone has updated maps and globes.
- Provide parents with a list of Social Studies topics and read-aloud book recommendations (i.e., Open Circle letters, TERC letters, Teaching Tolerance, Rethinking Schools).
- Establish a district and/or school wide 4th grade Geography Bee (model exists at Sheehan School); research National Geography Bee opportunities.

Middle School

Strengths:

- Students are enthusiastic about subject (indicated by recent survey results)
- High school faculty reports that students are well-prepared for high school
- Teachers are able to be flexible with curricular experience in the absence of MCAS testing
- Faculty is well-educated and seasoned
- Faculty is willing to try new things and collaborate between grade level teachers and among differing grade levels
- Many experiential opportunities are offered to students

Recommendations:

- Institute GRAPES (or similar acronym) as a frame for each unit of study
- Pilot an online textbook for 6th & 7th grade
- Embed within the 8th grade curriculum content that supports a culminating 8th grade class trip (Washington, DC or Philadelphia)
- Align WOSC with Social Studies curriculum and adjust activities accordingly

High School

Strengths:

- Teachers within the department are extremely collaborative with their colleagues constantly sharing materials and ideas.
- Teachers have rigorous expectations for all levels of students.
- Students are encouraged to “do” history and develop critical thinking skills for “real life” rather than merely memorize facts.
- Teachers are strong in their content area and willing to innovate.
- Students are encouraged to challenge themselves and move up levels.
- Teachers have a good rapport with their students, which creates a spirit of collaboration between them.
- Teachers work hard to help students develop the necessary skills to succeed.
- The department offers diverse course offerings, including hybrid classes, for students despite a smaller department size.
- Teachers are willing to work with other stakeholders to help their students (i.e., guidance, special education teachers, and parents).

Recommendations:

- Create more continuity between content and skills from the middle school to the high school.
- Create more diverse, globally-focused elective offerings, for example, Global Issues or International Relations.
- Propose semester-long elective courses for students in their junior year to dovetail with public speaking.
- Incorporate on-site learning experiences (major trips over vacation) and shorter field trips.
- Develop more varied extracurricular opportunities to enhance Social Studies concepts such as the Model UN and Mock Trials

Curriculum and Instruction

Elementary

Strengths:

- Teachers have a solid understanding of their social studies curriculum and social studies as history and teach with enthusiasm.
- Teachers have begun integrating their social studies curriculum into ELA with the CCSS.
- Some grade levels have shared experiences (5th grade encampment).
- Student survey results show that teachers use a variety of methods for instruction including reenacting events, creating models, utilizing websites with models, videos, diagrams, and sounds.

Recommendations:

- Develop curriculum maps that are horizontally and vertically aligned among the elementary schools
 - Clarify topics/sub-topics taught and include learning progressions
 - Include essential questions for each unit
 - Align with “GRAPES” (or other) framework
 - Identify assessment tools for each unit
 - Ensure the economics topics are consistently taught
- Integrate Social Studies topics within reading and writing units
 - Create integrated units for 2-3 topics at each grade level, using the DESE Model Curriculum Unit template as a guide
 - Cross-reference with released list of DESE Model Curriculum Units
- Increase opportunities to develop in students a current, global perspective
 - Start with Westwood news in K and grow into international/world news as the students move up grade levels.
 - Embed current events into morning meeting
 - Utilize kid-friendly news outlets (i.e. Time For Kids, dogonews.com)
 - Create a global citizenship unit that grows with each grade level.
 - Partner schools throughout country/world to help with awareness of other cultures <http://www.sister-cities.org/>
- Curate resources and make available to teachers
 - **Text sets:** Purchase/organize text sets that address all readers’ needs; higher to lower level texts that connect to the calendar for student readiness (topics that are taught at the beginning of the year have lower level texts than topics that are taught at the end of the year). Identify texts that dramatically show diverse perspectives along with texts that are more neutral.
 - **Primary sources** to connect to the curriculum topics (i.e. artifacts related to Colonial Times for grade 3, examples of Native American artifacts)

Middle School

Strengths:

- Faculty talents complement one another well
- Faculty supports students in their efforts to be high-achieving
- Curriculum is high interest; there are many different points of entry for students

Recommendations:

- Create a dynamic curriculum map for each grade level that is aligned horizontally and vertically and aligned to CCSS.
- Create a timing sequence to be followed for units of study, while still allowing for some teacher flexibility
- Create middle school social studies department-wide essential questions (3-5 in total)
- Create essential questions for units of study for each grade level
- Redesign 6th and 7th grade curriculum to reflect a thematic approach and a 2-year sequence
- Grade 8: Improve horizontal alignment of scope, sequence and instructional practices thereby creating a more common experience for students
- Curate resources for the development of grade level readers, thereby moving away from the traditional textbooks model

High School

Strengths:

- The department works to develop innovative curriculum, set high standards and encourage rigorous common assessments in response to the Common Core.
- Teachers have a good deal of independence to develop their own lessons, which encourages creativity, collaboration and enthusiasm.
- Teachers employ a variety of instructional practices to deliver curriculum content including but not limited to: Lecture, large and small group discussion, interactive media, debate, mock trial, research, document analysis, and film analysis.
- Teachers make a conscious effort to connect historical content with content from other eras and the present day.
- Teachers utilize diverse curriculum materials - including, but not limited to: textual primary sources, visual primary sources, scholarly secondary sources and media (e.g. podcasts, videos, and musical recordings.)

Recommendations:

- Develop curriculum maps that are horizontally and vertically aligned within the high school department and extending to the middle school.
- Develop common essential questions for each grade level
- Develop tiered, common skills-based objectives that extend from middle school to high school.
- Develop and pilot curriculum “readers” (primary & secondary sources) for use across a grade-level.

Assessment

Elementary

Strengths:

- Teachers have many modes of assessment throughout the district.
- Students share what they have learned through many different media forms (Pre PowerPoint, etc.).
- Some teachers have begun to create performance assessments which align with Social Studies topics and ELA standards.

Recommendations:

- Develop essential questions and common standards for each unit (that are also reflected on the report card).
- Align report card line items with S.S. topics/calendar/Common Core Standards.
- Create sample performance assessments for social studies topics and share across grade levels.
- Create content knowledge assessments based on the essential questions to be shared across grade levels.

Middle School

Strengths:

- There is evidence of common assessment areas and skills
- Assessments are differentiated
- Students are held to high standards

Recommendations:

- Develop three common unit assessments and three common writing assignments (one per trimester) at each grade level
- Align grading criteria with common core standards
- Set aside time and create protocols to examine student work for consistent standards
- Establish vertically aligned standards with the high school as criteria for level placement

High School

Strengths:

- The department maintains a tradition of writing for a variety of purposes: research, DBQs, and benchmark projects.
- Teachers within their grade-level subject matter have created common sections midyear and final exams.
- Teachers are developing Common Core common assessments for their respective grade-level subject matter.
- Some teachers use Google docs to provide real time feedback on assessments.

Recommendations:

- Continue to develop assessments and rubrics based on common core standards
- Create performance assessments that evaluate students' ability to gather information, read and analyze perspectives or events.
- Create formative and common summative assessments across grade levels.
- Set aside time and create protocols to examine student work for consistent standards.
- Create assessments that build on skills from year-to-year.

Professional Development

Elementary

Strengths:

- 2012-2013 PD with Dan Feigelson and Kathy Collins, writing about reading in content areas
- Teachers seek out PD outside of the district i.e. Teachers as Scholars, TEC, National Endowment for the Humanities.
- Teachers share professional resources with colleagues.
- Mentors/Curriculum Coaches support new teachers with teaching SS content.

Recommendations:

- Collect essential questions and understandings for units that are already taught.
- Align S.S. topics with ELA standards/calendar.
- Use PD time to create a curriculum calendar (with grade level) for when topics/assessments are to be taught and given.
- Inform teachers what Primary Sources, a local professional development organization, can offer.
- Create common/shared resource within grade levels (living documents, Google Doc)
- Create “Family Letters”, similar to those in Math, to inform parents about the topic(s) being studied, suggestions for home discussions, and enrichment opportunities
- Provide professional development time annually dedicated to social studies
 - Share information about what field trips are taken by each grade level (ex What is important to know about Plimoth Plantation? How best to support students’ learning there?)
 - Ensure that new teachers are ready for instruction
 - Refine existing units with updated resources and/or new methodologies for teaching

Middle School

Strengths:

- Faculty is constantly refining their curriculum and learning new pedagogical practices
- The department sets yearly professional development goals to bring focus to the work
- The department goes on an annual outing to further enrich their content knowledge, connect with other colleagues and promote collegiality
- Teachers share best practices during focused workshops and department meetings

Recommendations:

- Establish professional learning communities (PLC) for each grade level
- Faculty education to implement more technological resources into the classroom (set the stage for introduction of Chromebooks)
- Establish consistent practices regarding grading and high school placement with TMS and WHS Social Studies department
- Opportunity for district-wide collaboration among colleagues regarding student skill development

High School

Strengths:

- Members of the Social Studies department regularly participate in Teachers As Scholars, the Teaching American History, National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Institutes and the Bill of Rights Institute
- Teachers present at the New England Regional Conference on various historical lessons
- Teachers pursue advanced degrees in their content areas

Recommendations:

- Provide professional development around teaching literacy, specifically in regards to teaching comprehension of complex texts and crafting arguments
- Meet with the WHS English department to develop a common language around teaching reading and writing
- Provide professional development for integrating technology into the Social Studies curriculum in an authentic way
- Create tiered, common skills-based objectives that extend from middle school through high school
- Examine student work and instructional practices from grades 5 through 12

Instructional Technology:

Elementary

Strengths:

- Teachers have begun to use media/digital texts to use within social studies
- Teachers have begun to experiment with web-based, multimedia projects

Recommendations:

- Identify, disseminate, and utilize a variety of media sources (such as museum websites, video clips, virtual field trips, Google imaging) in the classroom instruction.
- Connect through Skype with “sister schools” to collaborate with students in other parts of the world.
- Expand opportunities for students to interact with community members with varied experiences through the use of technology.
- Draw on ITC’s expertise to create a web based resource depository for teachers
- **Digital:** Work with technology coaches to link an Elementary Social Studies site with the Elementary ELA site for shared resources/documents. Create a centralized resource of videos, digital texts, images that all teachers can access.

Middle School

Strengths:

- Access to instructional technology is becoming increasingly available
- Technology has facilitated providing feedback on student work.
- Technology has enabled better communication among teachers, students and parents

Recommendations:

- Make instructional technology more readily available (ex.: piloting online textbooks and gaining other resources through Chromebooks; improving student access to computers in the classroom; providing projectors in classrooms)

High School

Strengths:

- Teachers use Google sites/Aspen to communicate with students and parents about assignments, assessments and give other feedback.
- Teachers frequently incorporate instructional technology into lessons in an authentic and meaningful manner.
- Teachers collaborate with key personnel (librarian, ITC) to find new databases and e-book resources.

Recommendations:

- Research and implement quality internet-based teaching methods and tools.
- Investigate the use of a Learning Management System (LMS) for collecting and assessing student work.
- Discover or create and implement units that use online resources.