



# WESTWOOD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

## **Social Studies Curriculum Review Report**

*March 2022*

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## I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### A. Review Committee

During curriculum review processes, the Westwood Public Schools makes an effort to ensure thoughtful representation on the review team of individuals with different roles and perspectives from each of the schools and grade levels. The following team members contributed to the 2019-2021 Social Studies review process.

Lauren Bergiel, High School Special Educator  
Allison Borchers, Assistant Superintendent  
Robin Bova, Middle School Social Studies Teacher  
Mary Comer, Instructional Technology Coach  
Alison Donahue, High School Social Studies Teacher  
Maggie Dowd, Sheehan Teacher  
Kate Doyle, Elementary Science Coordinator  
Ruby Fyffe, High School Student (Class of 2022)  
Abigail Hansom, Director of Student Services  
Chris Hilton, High School Social Studies Department Head  
Annie Iannazi, Middle School Social Studies Teacher  
Beth Kelly, Hanlon Teacher  
Chrissy Leahy, Downey Teacher  
Carol Lewis, School Committee Member  
Brian McEachern, High School Social Studies Teacher  
Marisa Olivo, Middle School Humanities Department Head (2019-2021)  
Jonas Sherr, Professional Development Coordinator  
Amber Sleath-Crowley, Downey Teacher  
Catherine Starsiak, Sheehan Teacher  
Katherine Stewart, Middle School Humanities Department Head (2021-2022)  
Beth Swinning, Martha Jones Librarian  
Marcia Uretsky, Elementary Social Studies Coordinator  
Liz Williamson, Parent  
Jeremy Wolfe, Hanlon Teacher

### B. Review Cycle and Goals

The Westwood Public Schools has an ongoing curriculum review and development cycle so that each curriculum area is examined every six to eight years. Through this process, curriculum review teams of teachers, administrators, students and parents review our curriculum, research best practices, review educational literature, and examine learning standards in order to make recommendations for program improvement. Teams of teachers work during department

meeting times and during the summer curriculum development process to update curriculum and implement the recommendations.

The Social Studies review began in the fall of 2019, and was put on hold during the beginning for the COVID-19 pandemic. The full team reconvened in the spring of 2021, and the leadership team (Elementary Humanities Coordinator, Middle School Humanities Department Head and High School Department Head) finished the process of drafting the full report.

In spring 2022, after sharing recommendations with K-12 teachers and the public, the leadership team began the process of identifying program resources, writing curriculum and developing curriculum maps with the goal of implementing recommendations next year. The interrupted review cycle for Social Studies introduced some changes that ultimately proved helpful to the process. Specifically, holding more frequent meetings during a shorter time span allowed the group to make quicker progress.

A revised chart of the recent and curriculum reviews appears below.

**Westwood Public Schools**  
*Curriculum Review Cycle, 2018-2024*

	Review	Recommend/Develop	Implement
2018-2019	English Language Arts & Literacy	SEL	Science & Engineering
2019-2020	Social Studies/ Wellness	English Language Arts & Literacy	SEL
2020-2021	Social Studies/ Wellness	n/a	English Language Arts & Literacy
2022-2023	Spring: Mathematics Fall: Library Media/ Digital Literacy and Computer Science	Social Studies/ Wellness	n/a
2023-2024	Visual & Performing Arts	Spring: Mathematics Fall: Library Media/ Digital Literacy and Computer Science	Social Studies/ Wellness
2024-2025	World Languages	Visual & Performing Arts	Spring: Mathematics Fall: Library Media/ Digital Literacy and Computer Science

	Review	Recommend/Develop	Implement
2025-2026	Science & Engineering	World Languages	Visual & Performing Arts

### C. Curriculum Review Process

Every review process involves visioning, conducting an internal scan in order to understand the impact of current programs and practices, investigating promising approaches and resources used in other schools and districts, researching best practices, and generating recommendations for improvement.

During the Social Studies Review, the review team conducted and debriefed several rounds of vertical learning walks--daylong sessions for educators with varied roles to observe instruction in elementary, middle and high school classes firsthand. Team members also looked at recent changes to the state History and Social Studies Framework, compiled information about textbooks as well as teaching resources, explored the course sequences at other schools, considered connections between social studies instruction in other content areas (math, science, English language arts, visual and performing arts), examined the impact of leveled and Advanced Placement classes at the high school, and discussed ways that the new civic project requirement in middle and high school could be implemented in a way that is both meaningful to students and manageable, logistically.

At the conclusion of these investigations, team members generated ideas for specific recommendations. Their ideas were then turned into draft recommendations by the leadership team and shared with the full committee for comment/revision. Final revisions were made by the leadership team in preparation for the full report.

### D. Vision Statement

Early on in the process, the team began to develop a vision statement that was refined over several sessions. This vision is designed to reflect what the team hopes to see Westwood Public Schools students doing within 3-5 years as a result of their social studies learning:

*Students in the Westwood Public Schools explore geography, history, economics, politics, and social movements in order to learn about the past, make sense of the present, and shape the future. They observe, ask questions, define problems, find information, and propose solutions.*

*Students investigate primary and secondary source material including texts, images, artifacts and digital media. They recognize the importance of perspective as well the impact of bias, and they seek varied sources of evidence in order to examine events and political systems from multiple points of view. They engage in civil discourse in order to*

*share their thoughts and to understand experiences, ideas and opinions that differ from their own.*

*Students participate actively in their communities, using what they learn in social studies to advocate for change, and preparing to become engaged citizens in a democratic society.*

This vision works in concert with the broader vision for Westwood students as stated in the district's strategic priorities outline:

*Graduates of the Westwood Public Schools are skilled, confident, curious, and kind: excited for their futures and ready to contribute to their communities*

### **E. Recommendations Overview**

As the curriculum review team examined our program, a few key themes emerged. First, the group identified the need to update and map the PreK -12 curriculum in order to ensure that teaching is aligned with the new state standards, that learning is framed around meaningful essential questions that support student engagement, and that the sequence of courses supports students' development of skills and understanding over time. In addition, appropriate curriculum resources are needed to support instruction in many grade levels. Currently, teachers spend a lot of time pulling together course materials that are age-appropriate, high-interest and well-researched. Finally, the team identified a need to create structures that make it easy to update curriculum so that WPS keeps up to date with current research and scholarship.

Beyond this foundational work, the team identified the need to provide professional development at all levels for several reasons. At the elementary level, some professional development is needed to support teachers' foundational knowledge in history and social studies. Many elementary educators have strong grounding in literacy and math instruction, but graduate training programs devote less time to supporting social studies instruction.

In addition, educators need support around strategies for differentiating instruction. Starting with grade 3 Massachusetts history, the social studies frameworks are very dense: students are expected to learn a great deal of information and to refine their skills each year. Content-rich frameworks can pose a particular challenge for educators in terms of differentiation, and we want to ensure that students with a wide array of foundational literacy skills improve their knowledge and understanding.

In social studies, students wrestle with cultural similarities and differences, religion, politics, economics, and history--topics that must be approached with sensitivity, an awareness of biases, and a capacity to facilitate conversations that preserve the dignity of all participants and respect differences in experiences and beliefs. Teachers have expressed wariness when it comes to lessons and class discussion that could be controversial. Additional professional development

and support is needed so that instead of avoiding important topics, Westwood educators develop confidence and skill in establishing and holding students accountable for clear classroom norms, in designing lessons that support learning and growth for a diverse student population, and in framing lessons and activities in a way that acknowledges varying viewpoints. Additional professional development for curriculum and school leaders will help the leadership team to support teacher teams and to listen and respond to student, parent and community feedback.

Finally, the committee discussed the importance of providing opportunities for students to identify topics for in-depth study, to choose how they will showcase their learning, and to pursue projects that address real-world problems. Choice and relevance are critical factors in supporting students' investment in the learning process, and more frequent incorporation of these elements into the curriculum will help move us closer to our vision for social studies learning in Westwood.

A complete listing of recommendations is in Appendix A.

#### **F. Timeline**

Work to address recommendations has already started. This timeline begins with Summer 2020, and highlights the order for addressing critical recommendations. Some work (e.g., expanding curriculum through diversification of perspectives, voices and topics) not included on the timeline below is ongoing.

##### *Summer 2020*

- Initial curriculum mapping in grade 10

##### *Summer 2021*

- Initial curriculum mapping in grades 6, 7, 8 and 11.

##### *School year 2021- 2022*

- Leadership team review of information gathered and drafting of recommendations and report
- Course materials PD for elementary teachers in grade 3 - 5.
- Development of proposal and plan for a civics course at WHS

##### *Summer 2022*

- Initial K - 5 curriculum mapping
- Preparation for AP World History to replace AP European History for Fall 2022
- Preparation for civics course at WHS
- Refine and implement grade 8 Civic Action Project

##### *School Year 2022-2023*

- Piloting of new curriculum resources for grades 3 - 5

- Exploration of new curriculum resources for grade 6 - 7 and 9 - 11
- K - 5 professional development focused on social studies (content, instructional strategies)
- Develop common language and approaches to skill development in grade 6 - 8
- Continue refining curriculum maps K-12
- Evaluate course sequence for grades 9 - 11
- Develop options for additional electives in grade 12 social studies

*Summer 2023*

- Develop/refine experiential learning opportunities for elementary students.
- Update elementary report cards

*School Year 2023-2024*

- PD on developing opportunities of choice and voice
- Implement common curriculum planning time with other departments to support interdisciplinary instruction

**G. Conclusion**

In conclusion, it is important to recognize that the Westwood Public Schools are already graduating students who have a strong understanding of the principles and structures of government, who can use a historical lens when considering current events, and who know how to conduct research, support arguments with substantive evidence, and draw conclusions about what they read, observe and hear.

The goal of the recommendations put forward by the review team is to support continued strength in these areas and growth in others, so that our social studies curriculum provides students with even greater opportunities to think critically, read widely, and become informed citizens and active participants in public life.