

NCCSS Position and Response to ACRE Social Studies Proposed Essential Standards Draft 1.0

The Board of Directors of the North Carolina Council for the Social Studies (NCCSS) has a keen interest in the Essential Standards for Social Studies proposed by the NC Department of Public Instruction under the Accountability and Curriculum Reform Effort (ACRE). Individually, our Board members read the proposed standards, and we met collectively to discuss the standards.

The NCCSS Board understands the necessity for the periodic review of curricula in all disciplines. In previous revisions members of the NCCSS have been involved in advising, writing, and revising *Standard Course of Study* goals and objectives and support documents. We support the motivation for considering changes to the current social studies curriculum under the ACRE process.

We recognize that some areas of the current social studies curriculum are not adequate, especially the current 1790 to the Present U.S. History course that requires teachers to cover too much material too quickly. It is important to address the question, "What is essential?" in determining a revised scope and sequence and what content and skills are to be included at each grade level. We also realize that any reform effort is constrained by laws passed by the NC Legislature, as well as other factors.

The NCCSS Board has several reservations about the proposed Essential Standards that are addressed in this letter. These points were discussed at a NCCSS Board of Directors meeting on February 24, 2010 attended by a majority of our officers and board members.

General Concerns

Some general comments about the proposed standards include the following:

1. Civics and Government, Geography, History, Culture and Economics are not treated equally in Draft 1.0 of the Essential Standards. Although there are strands for each discipline, they are heavily weighted toward history.
2. It appears that students will develop a limited perspective of the world from the focus on U.S. and N.C. History that dominates several grade levels.
3. While globalism seems to have a prominent role in the proposed standards, this should not be seen as a substitute for geography, which gives students a spatial awareness and context, and helps them understand how people interact with their environments. If we want our students to be successful in history, civics, and economics courses in high school they must have a spatial context and geographic framework of the world. The proposed standards for the middle grades do not provide this framework.
4. We also feel that as the drafts progress, the standards and clarifying objectives must be teacher friendly and focused. In Draft 1.0 many of the essential standards and clarifying objectives are too vague. There needs to be more specificity, especially in the clarifying objectives as to what students need to know and do and more specific examples rather than vague examples such as "various civilizations."

Specific Comments on U.S. History

We are aware that the proposed course structure and content has generated significant controversy and often negative reactions from many sources. We also recognize that future drafts of the U.S. History course(s) will be different than the proposed structure in Draft 1.0. The NCCSS makes these recommendations on any future U.S. History course at the high school level.

1. U.S. History should begin with the pre-Colonial Era and the founding of the United States of America.
2. Since a majority of high schools operate under a block schedule, one semester (90 days) is not adequate to cover U.S. History from the pre-Colonial era to the present. We strongly urge DPI and the NC State Board of Education to **require** U.S. History as a two-semester (or 2 year) course that covers U.S. History from the pre-Colonial Era to the present.
3. There should be one EOC test for U.S. History at the high school level.
4. We oppose making one semester (year) required and a second semester (year) a local option, as many LEAs will opt out due to cost. Making U.S. History optional depending on your zip code or LEA does not provide the same opportunity to learn from Manteo to Murphy.

Specific Comments on Civics and Economics

As written, Draft 1.0 is inadequate. Three areas of the C&E draft need changes:

1. C&E needs to include an essential standard dealing with Civil, Criminal, and Juvenile Law. (Found in the current SCOS Goal 5).
2. Make the "state" government specific to North Carolina's government, Constitution, and charters. (Found in the current SCOS Goal 3).
3. Personal Financial Literacy should be taught in one of the following Career Technical Education (CTE) courses: *Living Independently through Financial Education (LIFE) Course #7085* or *Principles of Business and Personal Finance Course #6200/6600*.

Specific Comments Middle Grades and Grade 5

The proposed standards for grades 6-8 and grade 5 seem to be predicated on the proposal for U.S. History in Draft 1.0. Under that scenario, pre-1877 U.S. History would be taught over grades 5, 7 and 8 along with North Carolina History. It is open to question whether students will adequately recall history presented in grades 5, 7 and 8 sufficiently to provide a background for understanding post-1877 history presented in high school. Since the next draft of the Essential Standards will reflect different U.S. History course(s) for high school than originally proposed, Draft 1.0 for fifth grade and the middle school should also be revised.

One troubling aspect of the proposed standards for grades 6-8 is the uneven chronological time periods across the grades levels. To study several thousand years in grade six with a heavy emphasis on ancient civilizations and then shift to a U.S. and North Carolina-centered view of the world covering 350 and 70 years respectively is neither logical nor sound pedagogy.

Another problem is the lack of geography content, especially when compared to the present SCOS. The present curriculum gives students in grades 4-7 an expanding understanding of their world beginning with North Carolina and exposing them to the major regions of the world through the disciplines of human (cultural) and physical geography, history, government, and economics. Most of these elements in the current SCOS are being sacrificed for a much narrower, chronological view of the world through the lens of the United States and North Carolina. When will the students learn about the world: places, peoples, physical processes that shape their world, and modern cultures? While some of these topics are included in Draft 1.0, they seem disconnected and lack any type of regional approach. We recommend keeping the current balanced content and scope and sequence for these grades.

Additional Concerns

The NCCSS Board of Directors raised several questions around the impact new Essential Standards will have on DPI and LEAs.

1. If significant changes are made, what provision is being made for professional development? What funding is being sought for this training? Are teachers in grades 5, 7, and 8 equipped to teach U.S. History (if the proposed changes are made)?
2. Will university and college teacher education programs be in place to prepare teachers with the necessary content knowledge?
3. What textbooks are available for the proposed scope and sequence of social studies? Will funds for the purchase of textbooks be available before the standards are implemented? What provisions are being considered if suitable textbooks cannot be found? It is not safe to assume that all school systems have the computer hardware and bandwidth to handle online resources in lieu of a textbook.
4. What funds will be made available for the purchase of new print and non-print media for school libraries and media centers to support the new curriculum?

Furthermore, NCCSS is concerned about the ever-increasing marginalization of Social Studies instruction in elementary and middle schools throughout North Carolina. No matter what Essential Standards and scope and sequence for social studies emerges or which social studies disciplines are emphasized, if social studies content, concepts, and skills are not taught in all grades we will continue to have students unprepared to handle the high school curriculum. While this issue is not explicitly addressed in the ACRE program, we feel it must be raised and pursued. The NCCSS is willing to take a lead role informing legislators, State Board of Education and local Board of Education members, LEA administrators and parents that marginalization exists and is a disservice to all our students.

The North Carolina Council for the Social Studies is the voice for teachers of all the disciplines of social studies. We raise these concerns out of our collective knowledge of what we feel is important for students to know and to be able to do, and out of our passion for social studies. In the next weeks and months we offer ourselves collectively and individually to assist in future drafts of the essential standards and clarifying objectives. We also offer our assistance and expertise in the development of the proposed toolkit and future professional development.

Most of all, let this dialog continue so that we end up with the best social studies curriculum to meet the needs of the students of North Carolina in the 21st Century.

Respectfully,

Steve Pierce, NCCSS President

On behalf of the Officers and Board of Directors of the North Carolina Council for the Social Studies