

Curriculum Guidelines for Social Studies Teaching and Learning

A Position Statement of National Council for the Social Studies

Social studies is the integrated study of the social sciences and humanities to promote civic competence. Within the school program, social studies provides coordinated, systematic study drawing upon such disciplines as anthropology, archaeology, economics, geography, history, law, philosophy, political science, psychology, religion, and sociology, as well as appropriate content from the humanities, mathematics, and natural sciences. The primary purpose of social studies is to help young people develop the ability to make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world.

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation, implemented in 2002, describes the social studies disciplines of civics/government, economics, geography, and history as “core academic subjects,” and requires teachers of these subjects to meet their state’s definition of a “highly qualified” teacher. However, there is no mention of the core contents of social studies in requirements for assessments, and one of the consequences of No Child Left Behind has been a steady reduction in the amount of time spent in the teaching of social studies.

The National Council for the Social Studies reaffirms that an excellent education in social studies is essential to civic competence and the maintenance and enhancement of a free and democratic society.

Social studies teaching and learning are powerful when they are meaningful, integrative, value-based, challenging, and active.

1. Meaningful

The social studies program should relate to the age, maturity, and concerns of students. The social studies program should help students connect social studies content to their lives.

1.1 The program should provide students with a social studies experience at all grade levels, K-12. In grades K-5, every student should receive instruction in social studies every school day, and in grades 6-8, either every school day or the equivalent thereof. At the high school level, there should be a minimum of 3.5 credit hours for every student.

1.2 The program should involve students in the formulation

of goals, the selection of activities and instructional strategies, and the assessment of curricular outcomes.

1.3 The program should be based on the developmental and psychological needs of the students.

1.4 The program should focus on the social world as it is: its flaws, its strengths, its dangers, and its promise.

1.5 The program should include the study not only of human achievements, but also of human failures.

1.6 The program should emphasize pervasive and enduring social issues and connect them to the lives of students.

1.7 The program should demonstrate the relationships among local, regional, national, and global issues.

1.8 The program should include analysis of and attempts to formulate potential resolutions of present and controversial global problems.

1.9 The program should provide intensive and recurring cross-cultural study of groups.

1.10 The program should offer opportunities for students to interact with members of other racial, ethnic, and cultural groups.

1.11 The program should provide opportunities for students to examine potential future conditions and problems.

1.12 The program should provide a connection to the world of work through the exploration of careers and the application of essential social studies skills.

2. Integrated

The social studies program should draw from currently valid knowledge representative of human experience, culture, and beliefs in all areas of the social studies. Strategies of instruction and learning activities should rely on a broad range of learning resources.

2.1 The program should integrate current valid social studies concepts, principles, and theories in anthropology, archaeology, economics, geography, history, law, philosophy, political science, psychology, religion, and sociology.

2.2 The program should develop proficiency in methods of inquiry and analyzing, organizing and using data.

2.3 The program should balance the immediate social environment of students and the larger social world, examining multiple viewpoints.

2.4 The program should use a variety of primary and secondary sources that accommodate a wide range of reading abilities and interests.

2.5 The program should promote critical, creative, and ethical thinking on problems faced by citizens and leaders.

2.6 The program should use the expertise and experiences of a variety of community resource people.

2.7 The program should foster life-long learning.

3. Value-based

The social studies program should consider the ethical dimensions of topics and address controversial issues while providing an arena for reflective development of concern for the common good and the application of democratic values.

3.1 The program should help students understand the role that values play in decision making.

3.2 The program should give students the opportunity to think critically and make value-based decisions.

3.3 The program should support different points of view, respect for well-supported positions, and sensitivity to cultural similarities and differences.

3.4 The program should encourage students to develop a commitment to social responsibility, justice, and action.

3.5 The program should encourage students to examine and evaluate policy and its implications.

3.6 The program should give students the opportunity to think critically and make value-based decisions about related social issues.

4. Challenging

The social studies program should provide students with challenging content, activities, and assessments.

4.1 The program should provide students with the opportunity to engage in reflective discussion as they listen carefully and respond thoughtfully to one another's ideas.

4.2 The program should expose students to sources of information that include conflicting perspectives on controversial issues.

4.3 The program should provide students with the opportunity to formulate oral and written responses to content-based questions and issues.

4.4 The program should promote critical, creative, and ethical thinking on problems faced by citizens and leaders.

4.5 The program should include in the evaluation process an assessment of progress not only in knowledge, but also in skills, and abilities, including thinking, valuing, and social participation.

4.6 The program should use evaluation data for planning curricular improvements and ensure a challenging curriculum.

4.7 The program should be evaluated using data from traditional and alternative assessments.

5. Active

The social studies program should engage the student directly and actively in the learning process.

5.1 The program should provide a wide and rich range of learning activities.

5.2 The program should offer students opportunities to formulate hypotheses and test them by gathering and analyzing data.

5.3 The program should encourage students to be involved in service-learning projects.

5.4 The program should be sufficiently varied and flexible to engage all types of learners.

5.5 The program should include activities that contribute to the students' perception of teachers as fellow inquirers.

5.6 The program should create a climate that supports students' self respect and respect for others.

5.7 The program should stimulate students to investigate and respond to the human condition in the contemporary world.

5.8 The program should encourage students to participate in a variety of individual, small group, and whole class activities.

5.9 The program should utilize many kinds of workspace to facilitate variation in the size of groups, the use of several kinds of media technology, and a diversity of tasks.

5.10 The program should encourage students to function as a learning community.

Responsibilities of Social Studies Teachers

Teachers should participate in active social studies curriculum committees with decision-making as well as advisory responsibilities. Teachers should participate regularly in activities that foster professional competence in social studies education, such as professional development, higher education, professional organizations, community affairs, reading, study, and travel.

Social Studies as an Integral Part of the School Program

Social studies education should receive vigorous support as a vital and responsible part of the school program. Appropriate instructional materials, time, and physical facilities must be provided for social studies education. A specific block of time should be allocated for social studies instruction for all grades K-12 equivalent to time provided for non-social studies core content areas. Social studies education should receive active support and funding for professional development from administrators, teachers, boards of education, and the community. Teachers and schools should have and be able to rely upon a district-wide policy statement on academic freedom and professional responsibility. 📖

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