

NEWTON GUIDELINES FOR HISTORY CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

Currently the Newton history departments, along with other history departments statewide, are undergoing a curriculum revision process to align our curriculum with the new *Massachusetts History and Social Science Curriculum Framework* adopted by the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education on June 26, 2018.

We expect the process of revising our course outlines to take two to three years. Throughout the process, we will root our curriculum development in several principles outlined by the *Massachusetts History and Social Science Curriculum Framework* and included on the subsequent pages.

The Newton history departments value the creative lesson planning skills of our teachers. Thus, while our new course outlines will designate broad content learning goals, they will not mandate the use of specific lesson plans.

In addition to rooting our work in the *Massachusetts History and Social Science Curriculum Framework*, we will continue to engage in professional development opportunities with respected academic institutions in order to ground our work in the most recent scholarship.

We will also continue to use credible and scholarly secondary sources in our lessons. Credible sources are those for which we “trust that the author’s ideas are their own and can be backed up with evidence.”¹ Scholarly sources are “written by experts, reviewed by other experts, and provide supporting evidence.”² We will cite sources we distribute to students.

Since the study of history relies on analyzing primary sources, students will be asked to read a wide range of primary sources representing multiple perspectives. In any lessons involving primary sources, teachers provide students with the historical context of the documents and ask the students to recognize the point of view, purpose, bias, and impact of the sources. In exposing students to a wide variety of perspectives and ideas, we aspire to teach students not what to think but *how* to think.

¹ “LibGuides: Research & Resources: An Introduction: How to Choose Credible Resources (Evaluating Resources).” *How to Choose Credible Resources (Evaluating Resources) - Research & Resources: An Introduction - LibGuides at Spokane Falls Community College*, Spokane Falls Community College, 14 Nov. 2018, libguides.spokanefalls.edu/c.php?g=288859&p=2711625.

²ibid..

The following principles guide our curriculum work and are excerpted directly from the *Massachusetts History and Social Science Curriculum Framework* adopted by the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education June 26, 2018.

Education for Civic Life in a Democracy

The primary purpose of a history and social science education is to prepare students to have the knowledge and skills to become thoughtful and active participants in a democratic society and a complex world. “Government of the people, by the people, for the people” is not just a historical phrase from Lincoln’s “Gettysburg Address,” but an ideal that must be renewed and reinvigorated by each succeeding generation. The future of democracy depends on our students’ development of knowledge, skills, and dispositions that will enable them to embrace democracy’s potential, while recognizing its challenges and inherent dilemmas.

Guiding Principles for Effective History and Social Science Education

An effective history and social science education teaches students about the legacy of democratic government.

Study of history and social science prepares students to understand their rights and responsibilities as informed residents and citizens of a democratic society and to appreciate the shared values of this country. To become informed citizens, students need to acquire knowledge and experience of

- the principles and philosophy of government in the founding documents of the United States,
- the structure and purposes of democratic government in the United States at the national, state, and local level,
- the structure and purposes of types of government other than democracy,
- how the concepts of liberty, equality, justice, and human and civil rights shape the United States,
- the achievements of democratic government and the challenges to maintaining it,
- ways to act as a citizen to influence government within the democratic system,
- the importance of respectful public discourse and dissent in a democracy.

An effective history and social science education incorporates diverse perspectives and acknowledges that perceptions of events are affected by race, ethnicity, culture, religion, education, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, and personal experience.

The traditional motto of the United States is “*e pluribus unum*” – out of many, one. A history and social science education that does justice to the remarkable diversity of our country must tell the histories of individuals and groups, and honor a plurality of life stories while acknowledging our ongoing struggle to achieve a more perfect union. Teaching how the concepts of freedom, equality, the rule of law, and human rights have influenced United States and world history necessarily involves discussions of race, ethnicity, culture, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, and other characteristics. Effective instruction challenges students to value their own heritage while embracing our common ideals and shared experiences as they develop their own rigorous thinking about accounts of events. Effective instruction celebrates the progress the United States has made in embracing diversity, while at the same time encouraging honest and informed academic discussions about prejudice, racism, and bigotry in the past and present.

An effective history and social science education teaches students to think historically.

Taken together, the standards in the Massachusetts History and Social Science Frameworks presents a broad scope of time and place, from human beginnings to the present, with the intent of helping students understand that *their* lives are connected to the long sweep of history.... In high school, students learn that complex events have both intended and unintended consequences. By examining primary and secondary sources, students develop an appreciation for the importance of historical context and point of view. They learn that participants in historical events can often hold vastly different ideas about how those events unfolded. For example, what the Spanish considered a “conquest” of a new world in the Americas was seen rather differently by those whose lands were being invaded by foreigners. Students also learn that the work of historical investigation is never static because new evidence – a fresh archaeological find, a lost manuscript or photograph found in an archive – can inspire new connections and interpretations. Because historians of different generations can have different perceptions, it is important that readings include a variety of opinions and historical interpretations.

An effective history and social science education builds students' capacities for research, reasoning, making logical arguments, and thinking for themselves.

In an effective history and social science education, students engage in inquiry, reading, research, discussion, writing, and making presentations – these activities are the heart of this Framework's Standards for History and Social Science Practice and link the history/social science disciplines to English language arts and literacy. In the course of applying these practices, students learn how to evaluate texts for bias intended to influence their opinions, and about the patterns of thought and reasoning of historians, geographers, political scientists, and economists. They learn to raise and refine questions and organize arguments and explanations by using structures such as comparison and contrast, cause and effect, or problem and solution. They learn to apply different forms of analysis, including contextually rich reading, visual analysis, spatial/geographical analysis, or quantitative reasoning.

An effective history and social science education improves reading comprehension by increasing students' content knowledge.

A rich education in history and social science involves extensive reading of challenging grade-level texts, which not only contributes to the development of basic reading skills but also introduces students to concepts and academic language that ultimately improve reading comprehension. Researcher Daniel Willingham contends that "teaching content is teaching reading." [1] Content knowledge improves reading comprehension because it enables a student to make connections about events and ideas across texts....This foundational knowledge, in turn, prepares students to read texts that address topics of increasing complexity..l.

An effective history and social science education incorporates the study of current events and news/media literacy.

When teaching history and social science, teachers have a unique responsibility to help students consider events – including current events – in a broad historical, geographical, social, or economic context. The Framework's News/Media Literacy standards for grade 8 and high school are designed to help students take a critical stance toward what they read, hear, and view in newspapers and on websites, television, and social media. Applying these standards, students learn to evaluate information, question and verify its source, distinguish fact from inference, and reasoned judgment supported by evidence from varying degrees of bias.[2]

An effective history and social science education teaches students about using data analysis and digital tools as research and presentation techniques in the social sciences.

History and social science teachers have a long history of teaching students to read, interpret, and create graphs, charts, maps, timelines, and illustrations. New opportunities for answering questions with data are available in the ever-expanding supply of online databases. Particularly at the high school level, teachers can provide opportunities for students to apply their knowledge of quantitative reasoning and statistics, using “big data” to answer historical questions and solve problems. They can also provide opportunities for students to create digital exhibits that combine visual primary sources, video, and computer graphics to convey complex stories and interpretations of the past.[3]

An effective history and social science education develops social and emotional skills. Social and emotional learning has been demonstrated to increase academic achievement and communication skills, improve attitudes and behaviors, and develop empathy. [4]

These skills are also practical civic skills that students need to engage effectively with others in the public problem-solving of civic and democratic life. Teachers support the development of these skills by:

- helping students understand how their own unique experiences and ideas influence their perceptions of and feelings about history and current situations (self-awareness);
- encouraging students’ own power to take thoughtful action (self-management);
- increasing students’ understanding of others’ fundamental needs and human and civil rights (social awareness);
- increasing students’ capacity to participate in dialogue across differences and to take on the perspectives of others whose experience and position in the world differs from their own (dialogue and perspective-taking);
- encouraging students to collaborate respectfully with diverse peers (relationship skills);
- providing opportunities for students to define and make informed choices when participating in democratic practices (responsible decision making); and
- creating opportunities for students to work together on projects that aim to promote a public good beyond the classroom, in the school, or in the larger community (civic action).

History and Social Science Inquiry: Designing Questions and Investigations

At the heart of the Standards for History and Social Science Practice is the idea that knowledge and understanding arise from inquiry: asking questions, conducting research to find answers, analyzing ideas in discussions, and presenting conclusions. Inquiry serves to deepen conceptual understanding of content, going beyond a listing of names, dates, and facts.

Developing inquiry-driven curriculum and lessons entails providing opportunities for students to answer both questions developed by the teacher and those developed by students. In the course of any given unit, students should have opportunities to answer both their teacher's and their own questions about ideas and texts. The questions included in our curriculum are suggestions for the kinds of questions teachers and students might arrive at on their own.

Evaluating Sources of Information

Since history and social science involves the study of current events (and since students are more likely to gain their information online than from print sources), students increasingly have to apply media and news literacy skills and be aware that many websites contain written text, images, and data that have been manipulated to advance particular interests. Asking questions such as "What is the source of the information?" "Can it be verified?" helps students become more sophisticated consumers of news and opinion.³

Using Evidence and Reasoning to Answer Questions

Effective use of information to make and support claims is fundamental to constructing explanations and making arguments. Students may produce formal or informal reports or demonstrate their understanding through a variety of means, such as engaging in discussions, debates, simulations, or multi-media presentations. Answering their own questions in a thorough way brings the process of inquiry full circle, deepens understanding of history, geography, economics and government, and provides practical experience in applying questioning and researching to participation in civic life.

³ See McGrew, Sarah, Ortega Teresa, Breakstone, Joel, and Wineburg, Sam (2017), "[The Challenge that's Bigger than Fake News](#)," in *American Educator*, Fall 2017.