

Idaho State Board of Education  
650 W State St., 3rd floor  
Boise, ID 83720

May 16, 2024

Dear Idaho State Board of Education,

The National Association of Scholars (NAS) and the Civics Alliance work to ensure that every state has academic standards that promote first-rate education and protect school children from political indoctrination. We promote reform of content standards in every state, along the lines modeled by the Civics Alliance's *American Birthright: The Civics Alliance's Model K-12 Social Studies Standards*,<sup>1</sup> and we have been asked by Idaho citizens to comment on the draft Idaho Academic Standards for Social Studies<sup>2</sup> (Hereafter *Standards*.) We conclude that Idaho's *Standards* are far better than those of states such as Connecticut, Minnesota, and Rhode Island,<sup>3</sup> and that the draft *Standards* provide a solid basis for social studies instruction, although they would still benefit from systematic revision.

### **Solid Basis for Social Studies Instruction**

Idaho's *Standards* include fair amounts of factual content throughout, largely unpoliticized, which provide clear expectations for teachers and students. It presents its material as clear, bullet-pointed statements of fact, albeit distributed in many different files rather than collected in one file for easy review. We endorse Idaho's overall structure for its *Standards*, and generally endorse its content.

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<sup>1</sup>*American Birthright: The Civics Alliance's Model K-12 Social Studies Standards*, Civics Alliance, <https://civicsalliance.org/american-birthright/>.

<sup>2</sup> Content Standards Review, Idaho Department of Education, <https://sde.idaho.gov/academic/standards/standards-review.html>.

<sup>3</sup> David Randall, *Disowned Yankees: How Connecticut's Social Studies Standards Shortchange Students* (National Association of Scholars, 2024), <https://www.nas.org/reports/disowned-yankees>; Wilfred M. McClay, *National Expert: Minnesota's Academic Standards Among the Nation's Worst: Review of the 2021 Minnesota K-12 Academic Standards in Social Studies, Draft Three* (Center of the American Experiment, 2022), <https://files.americanexperiment.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Among-The-Nations-Worst.pdf>; David Randall, *Taken for a RIDE: How Rhode Island's Social Studies Standards Shortchange Students* (National Association of Scholars, 2023), <https://civicsalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Taken-for-a-RIDE.pdf>.

Where we disagree in detail about the choices and omissions, we would suggest revision along the lines of *American Birthright*—above all, to add more rigor and factual content. Idaho’s draft provides a good start for systematic revision of its *Standards*—but does not provide it an excuse not to engage in that systematic revision.

### **Shortcomings and Recommendations**

*Absent Reading and Writing Expectations.* Idaho’s *Standards* should have firm and clear expectations, which parents may use to hold their schools and their teachers accountable. Social studies instruction should include: Reading Expectations, which build toward students capable by graduation from high school of reading an intellectually and stylistically sophisticated 200-page history book, which demonstrates that they are prepared for an undergraduate history course; and Writing Expectations, which build toward students capable by graduation from high school of writing an intellectually and stylistically sophisticated 10-page history paper, which demonstrates that they are prepared for an undergraduate history course.

Recommendation: Provide firm and clear reading and writing expectations, which parents may use to hold their schools and their teachers accountable.

*Politicization:* The *Standards* includes politicized instruction and vocabulary. K.SS.4.4 says “Indigenous People’s Day” instead of “Columbus Day”—and it is telling that the *Standards* never mentions Christopher Columbus, and habitually uses the fashionably radical term “Indigenous” instead of Indian, American Indian, or Amerind. 6-9.WG.5.3 requires students to define “ethnocentrism,” which is essential vocabulary in radical polemic. Identity politics ideology informs standards such as 6-12.US1.12: “Compare the roles of Indigenous people, women, African Americans, and immigrants in the Revolution Period.” The *Standards* contain enough politicized language and instruction to give pause—and require revision.

Recommendation: Remove all politicized language and instruction from the *Standards*.

*Absent Core Disciplinary Concepts:* Liberty, Documents of Liberty, and Common American Culture: Idaho does not include Liberty, Documents of Liberty,<sup>4</sup> or Common American Culture<sup>5</sup> as core instructional focuses. These should be included explicitly as instructional focuses, to ensure proper organizing principles for social studies instruction—and to ensure that social studies instruction does not casually cast these aside.

Recommendation: Add core instructional focuses of Liberty, Documents of Liberty, and Common American Culture to the *Standards*, and revise it accordingly throughout.

*World History Substituted for Western Civilization:* The *Standards* cannot provide a coherent presentation of Western Civilization’s ideals and institutions of liberty, which Idaho students need if they are to understand the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, because they substitute a vague World History course for dedicated instruction in the history of Western Civilization.

Recommendation: Idaho should revise the *Standards* to contain discrete, sustained coverage of Western Civilization throughout K-12 instruction, to provide students the coherent narrative of the ideals and institutions of liberty contained within the histories of

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<sup>4</sup> E.g., KRS 158.196 Instructional materials standards and concepts -- Documents and speeches to be included., [https://apps.legislature.ky.gov/law/statutes/statute.aspx?id=53057&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_source=govdelivery](https://apps.legislature.ky.gov/law/statutes/statute.aspx?id=53057&utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery).

<sup>5</sup> For the history of American culture, see *American Birthright*, pp. 124-25, 130, 132, 136-37, 141 [Grade 11: United States History: Items 15, 39, 49, 63-64, 78].

the ancient Middle East, Israel, Greece, Rome, Medieval Christendom, the Renaissance, the Scientific Revolution, the Enlightenment, and medieval and early modern England. This instruction should include a dedicated and required class in high school.

Recommendation: Idaho should revise the *Standards* to contain discrete coverage of World History, either as an elective or as a required course, to introduce students to the histories of Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

### **Recommendations: Accompanying Measures**

Social studies standards reform should work in tandem with broader support for education reform. We urge Idaho to undertake several broader measures:

*Licensure Requirements, Professional Development and Textbooks:* We suggest that Idaho policymakers work to update the state’s licensure requirements, professional development, and textbook standards to align with the revisions we propose for the *Standards*.

*Dual Enrollment Course Standards Revision:* We suggest that Idaho policymakers enact laws that ensure that dual enrollment social studies courses (dual course, dual credit, concurrent enrollment) align with the revisions we propose for the *Standards*.

*Statutory Reform:* We suggest that Idaho policymakers enact laws that provide statutory underpinnings for the revisions we propose for the *Standards*.<sup>6</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Idaho has done a good work in producing these draft *Standards*—but it still should engage in systematic reform of the *Standards*, to address the criticisms we have made. We urge you to engage in this systematic reform. The draft *Standards* are acceptable, but Idaho’s citizens deserve excellent social studies standards.

Respectfully yours,



Peter Wood

President, National Association of Scholars



David Randall

Executive Director, Civics Alliance

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<sup>6</sup> Civics Alliance: Social Studies Curriculum Act, <https://civicsalliance.org/model-palm-card/social-studies-curriculum-act/>; Civics Course Act, <https://civicsalliance.org/model-k-12-civics-code/civics-course-act/>; United States History Act, <https://civicsalliance.org/model-k-12-civics-code/united-states-history-act/>; Western Civilization Act, <https://civicsalliance.org/model-k-12-civics-code/western-civilization-act/>; Historical Documents Act, <https://civicsalliance.org/model-k-12-civics-code/historical-documents-act/>; and more broadly, the Model K-12 Civics Code, <https://civicsalliance.org/model-k-12-civics-code/>.