

South Dakota Department of Education  
800 Governors Dr.  
Pierre, SD 57501

January 12, 2023

Dear South Dakota Department 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, and we have been asked by South Dakota citizens to comment on the *South Dakota Social Studies Standards* (Draft, Proposed 8/15/22).<sup>1</sup>

The National Association of Scholars and the Civics Alliance enthusiastically commend these Draft *Standards*. We believe these standards are a tribute to the good work of the Social Studies Content Standards Commission, excellent in themselves and among the best in the nation. They are an extraordinary improvement over the draft standards issued on August 5, 2021, which would have inflicted a politicized, content-poor social studies education on South Dakota students.<sup>2</sup> We strongly urge the South Dakota Department of Education to adopt the Draft *Standards* of 8/15/22.

We also believe these Social Studies Standards can still be improved. Our suggestions derive in good measure from the emphases of the Civics Alliance's *American Birthright: The Civics Alliance's Model K-12 Social Studies Standards*.<sup>3</sup> We recognize, however, that South Dakota has chosen a different model for its *Standards*, and we make our suggestions without seeking to impose

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<sup>1</sup> *South Dakota Social Studies Standards* (Draft, Proposed 8/15/22), <https://doe.sd.gov/ContentStandards/documents/SS-Proposed.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> *South Dakota Social Studies Content Standards* (Draft, Proposed 8/5/21), <https://doe.sd.gov/contentstandards/documents/SS-StandardsProposed.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> *American Birthright: The Civics Alliance's Model K-12 Social Studies Standards*, Civics Alliance, <https://civicsalliance.org/american-birthright/>.

the *American Birthright* approach in detail. We make our suggestions as ways to enhance what is already a splendid draft social studies standard.

### **The Draft *Standards*: Excellent Accomplishments**

The Draft *Standards* provide a coherent, rigorous, content-based, and patriotic guide to social studies instruction. Its virtues include:

- The Draft *Standards* takes a clear stand against both the discriminatory ideologies commonly referred to as Critical Race Theory and the subordination of social studies instruction to political activism.
- The Draft *Standards* provides factual content, rather than imposing “skills” instruction that is frequently counter-productive and always reduces the time available to learn factual knowledge.
- The Draft *Standards*’ format is absolutely clear and its language virtually devoid of jargon and euphemism. Any teacher can understand the Draft *Standards* at a glance—and so can parents who wish to hold their schools accountable for teaching their children properly.
- The Draft *Standards* provide a thorough education, keyed to the development of the ideas and institutions of liberty, in the core history of Western Civilization, of the United States, of South Dakota, and of the Native American tribes of South Dakota.
- The Draft *Standards*’ emphasis on spiraled instruction (concepts repeated at greater levels of detail in succeeding years) and memorization provides an effective framework for instruction.
- The Draft *Standards* provides joint instruction in patriotism and liberty—and should be wonderfully effective in producing South Dakota citizens who think freely and love their country.
- The Draft *Standards* thoughtfully integrates instruction at each grade level into a coherent whole, which is greater than the sum of its parts.
- The Draft *Standards* keys its level of rigor to a challenging but achievable level for students at each grade level.

In sum, the Draft *Standards* have aimed to create an excellent guideline to social studies instruction, and they have very largely succeeded in their ambition.

### **The Draft *Standards*: Suggestions for Improvement**

At the same time, the Draft *Standards* can be improved—albeit from a high level of achievement.

- **Writing Expectations:** The Draft *Standards* provide concrete writing expectations, but at too low a level. (Essay requirements, pp. 29, 36, 43, 49, 63, 73, 90, 113.) Social studies writing expectations should 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.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> *American Birthright*: Introduction, pp. 20-21.

*We urge the Department of Education to incorporate more rigorous writing expectations at the different grade levels.*

- **Western Civilization:** The Draft *Standards* frame their instruction as World History, but the substance is largely that of Western Civilization. We believe not only that Western Civilization should be the priority in social studies instruction but also that it is best taught as a discrete unit.

*We urge the Department of Education to re-commit itself formally to providing standards for Western Civilization as a discrete topic of social studies instruction throughout the K-12 curriculum.*<sup>5</sup>

- **World History:** We also believe that World History deserves sustained attention in a course of its own.

*We urge the Department of Education to commit itself to providing standards for a discrete course in World History, to complement these draft Standards excellent material for American History and Western Civilization.*<sup>6</sup>

- **American Culture:** The Draft *Standards* provides too little material on America's common culture. The high school United States History standards (pp. 89-111), for example, only includes the Hudson River School (p. 103), Art Deco (p. 107), the Harlem Renaissance and jazz music (p. 107), and Mount Rushmore and the Crazy Horse Memorial (p. 107).<sup>7</sup> South Dakota students should learn far more American cultural history.

*We urge the Department of Education to augment the Draft Standards with sustained material on the common culture of the American nation.*

- **Western Culture:** The same critique applies to The Draft *Standards*' coverage of Western culture in their World History sequence, which is similarly brief.<sup>8</sup> South Dakota students should learn far more intensively about the history of Western culture.

*We urge the Department of Education to augment the Draft Standards with sustained material on the history of Western culture.*

- **Native American History:** The Draft *Standards*' coverage of Native American history provides little history of Native American peoples outside of South Dakota.

*We urge the Department of Education to include comprehensive and comparative coverage of the different pre-Columbian peoples of North America and their interactions with*

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<sup>5</sup> Western Civilization Act, Civics Alliance, <https://civicsalliance.org/model-k-12-civics-code/western-civilization-act/>.

<sup>6</sup> *American Birthright: Grade 10, World History*, pp. 101-19.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. the extended coverage of American cultural history in *American Birthright: Grade 11, United States History*, Item 15 (pp. 124-25), Item 38 (p. 130), Item 48 (p. 132), Item 62J (p. 136), Item 63 (p. 136), Item 77 (p. 140).

<sup>8</sup> Cf. the extended coverage of Western cultural history in *American Birthright: Grade 9, The Development of Western Civilization*, Item 4 (p. 87), Item 17 (p. 90), Item 34c (p. 94), Item 59 (p. 100).

*different European settlers, both in its regular American history instruction and in its proposed stand-alone course in Native American History and Civics.*<sup>9</sup>

- **Tendentious Language:** The Draft *Standards* occasionally use tendentious language. “Capitalism” and “capitalist” are inventions of socialist polemic, predicated on Marx’s mistaken economics, and overwhelmingly used as invective against the free market rather than as historical description.

*We urge the Department of Education to remove such words from the Standards.*

- **Euphemisms:** The Draft *Standards* use the peculiar phrase “violation of the rights and lives” thrice in the high school World History standards. (9-12.WH.9.H-I, pp. 80-81; 9.12.WH.10.C, p. 81) This phrase euphemizes *mass murder* and *genocide* by the Soviet Union, fascist Italy and Japan, and Communist China.

*We urge the Department of Education to substitute plain language for this unfortunate resort to euphemism.*

- **Primary Sources:** The Draft *Standards* references a fair number of primary sources. At present, however, it is not easy for teachers to access the primary sources they reference.

*We urge the Department of Education to publish a publicly accessible reader of suggested primary sources on its website to facilitate the use of the Standards by teachers.*

The Department of Education can significantly improve its *Standards* if it adopts these proposals.

### **The Draft Standards: Suggestions for Accompanying Measures**

Social Studies standards should work in tandem with broader support for education reform. We suggest that the Department of Education undertake two broader measures:

- **Licensure Requirements:** The Draft *Standards* provide an excellent outline for teacher preparation and professional development for K-12 social studies teachers. The Department of Education should update its licensure requirements to ensure that its teachers are equipped to teach curriculum that aligns with these Standards.
- **Statutory Reform:** The Department of Education should ask state policymakers to enact laws that provide statutory underpinnings to the reforms embodied in this Draft *Standards*, and which ensure proper social studies instruction in all South Dakota public K-12 schools.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> *American Birthright: Grade 11, United States History, Items 1-15* (pp. 121-25), esp. Items 1-6 (pp. 121-22).

<sup>10</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/>; and more broadly, the Model K-12 Civics Code, <https://civicsalliance.org/model-k-12-civics-code/>.

**The Draft *Standards*: A Splendid First Draft**

The South Dakota Department of Education definitely should adopt the Draft *Standards* of 8/15/22. We make recommendations for revision of the Draft *Standards* in a friendly spirit, to build upon the wonderful work done by the Social Studies Content Standards Commission. South Dakota will have excellent Social Studies standards if it adopts this Draft unchanged—but even better ones if the Department of Education incorporates the revisions we recommend.

Respectfully yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Peter Wood". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping tail on the final letter.

Peter Wood  
President, National Association of Scholars

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David Randall". The signature is written in a clear, slightly cursive style.

David Randall  
Executive Director, Civics Alliance