

NATIONAL  
ASSOCIATION  
of SCHOLARS



Dr. Katie Jenner, Secretary of Education  
Indiana Department of Education  
Indiana Government Center North, 9th Floor  
100 N Senate Ave.  
Indianapolis, IN 46204

March 29, 2022

Dear Secretary Jenner,

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 Indiana citizens to comment on the draft Indiana Academic Standards for Social Studies.<sup>2</sup> (Hereafter *Standards*.) We conclude that Indiana's *Standards* are far better than those of states such as 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.

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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> Prioritized Standards Available for Public Comment, Indiana Department of Education <https://form.jotform.com/230305287967160>.

<sup>3</sup> 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>.

## Solid Basis for Social Studies Instruction

Indiana'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 Indiana's overall structure for its *Standards*, and generally endorse its content. 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. Indiana'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.* Indiana'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. USG2.8 includes “diversity” as one of the “fundamental principles and values of American political and civic life,” along with liberty and equality—which is not true, and will facilitate the imposition of the radical and illiberal “diversity, equity, and inclusion” ideology in Indiana public schools. The phrase “Students learn they are citizens of their school, community, and the United States” cheapens the value of American citizenship by conflating it with (by implication) publicspiritedness (K.Learning Outcome). The direction “Define immigration and explain how immigration enriches community” transforms social studies instruction into a partisan position on immigration policy (3.1.9). Terms such as *ethnocentrism* (7.3.13), *social justice* (USH.7.2), and *global climate change* (USH.8.2) assume the point at issue, and introduce modern ideological and partisan polemic into social studies instruction. Points such as “Explain the origins of legislation which began to unravel the work of the New Deal and the Great Society, including reforms in the areas of welfare, public housing, Social Security, and labor.” (USH.9.2) frame conservative policy reform simply as the negation of progressive policy initiatives, rather than as pursuing positive ideals. 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:* Indiana 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. The *Standards* frequently speak in phrases such as “the democratic process,” (e.g., USH.9.4), but do not address sufficiently *liberty, freedom, the Documents of Liberty, or America’s common culture.*

**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 Indiana students need if they are to understand the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, because they substitute a disjointed and vague World History course for dedicated instruction in the history of Western Civilization.

**Recommendation:** Indiana 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 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:** Indiana 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 Indiana to undertake several broader measures:

*Licensure Requirements, Professional Development and Textbooks:* We suggest that Indiana 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 Indiana 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*.

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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].

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

### Conclusion

Indiana 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 Indiana’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/>.