

NATIONAL
ASSOCIATION
of SCHOLARS

Civics
Alliance

from NATIONAL ASSOCIATION of SCHOLARS

State Board of Education
Texas Education Agency
1701 N. Congress Avenue
Austin, TX 78701

November 8, 2022

Dear 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*,¹ and we have been asked by Texas citizens to comment on the Proposed Revisions to 19 TAC Chapter 113, Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills for Social Studies, which would align with recent legislative requirements by updating the Texas social studies standards.²

We caution that some of the proposed language, as well as some existing language, may facilitate “action civics,” which would not align with the tenor of the legislation enacted by H.B. 3979 (2021).³ In six different places, the Proposed Revisions insert the following language:

Social studies skills. The student uses problem-solving and decision-making skills, working independently and with others. The student is expected to:

(A) use democratic procedures to collaborate with others when making decisions on issues in the classroom, school, or community; and

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

² Proposed State Board of Education Rules, Texas Education Agency, <https://tea.texas.gov/about-tea/laws-and-rules/sboe-rules-tac/proposed-state-board-of-education-rules>; [Proposed Revisions to 19 TAC Chapter 113, Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills for Social Studies,] <https://tea.texas.gov/sites/default/files/ch113-teks-1st-rdg-att1-0922.pdf>.

³ An Act Relating to the Social Studies Curriculum in Public Schools, H.B. 3979 (2021), <https://capitol.texas.gov/tlodocs/87R/billtext/pdf/HB03979F.pdf#navpanes=0>.

(B) use problem-solving and decision-making processes to identify a problem, gather information, list and consider options, consider advantages and disadvantages, choose and implement a solution, and evaluate the effectiveness of the solution.⁴

Everyone, of course, hopes that students will learn to solve problems, make decisions, work on their own, and cooperate with others. But these phrases increasingly have been used by advocates of using schools to steer students into promoting partisan positions. Left as written, this passage is an open door to the political hijacking of the civics curriculum. This new language, which repeats similar language that already exists in your standards for each social studies course,⁵ is the language of “action civics,” the heart of which is to use classroom time to organize students to carry out a political extracurricular project.⁶ The language in the Texas standards closely parallels a description of a Hawaii course in “action civics.”

Participation in Democracy, according to the report, “places a strong emphasis on experimental education.” It’s aimed at increasing students’ understanding about the U.S. government and other civics topics and demonstrating “the role of a citizen in civic action by selecting a problem, gathering information, proposing a solution, creating an action plan, and showing evidence of implementation.”

In fact, the report praises the course’s alignment with the National Council for the Social Studies’ new framework for state social studies standards — in particular, the dimension that promotes “Action Civics.”⁷

H.B. 3979 (2021), however, forbade the core elements of “action civics”:

- (3) a school district, open-enrollment charter school, or teacher may not require, make part of a course, or award a grade or course credit, including extra credit, for a student’s:
 - (A) political activism, lobbying, or efforts to persuade members of the legislative or executive branch at the federal, state, or local level to take specific actions by direct communication; or

⁴ [Proposed Revisions to 19 TAC Chapter 113, Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills for Social Studies]: Kindergarten, Grade 1, Grade 2, Grade 3, Grade 4, Grade 5, Grade 6.

⁵ [Background Information and Justification,] <https://tea.texas.gov/sites/default/files/22-10-113a-c.pdf>.

⁶ Stanley Kurtz, “‘Action Civics’ Replaces Citizenship with Partisanship,” *The American Mind*, January 16, 2021, <https://americanmind.org/memo/action-civics-replaces-citizenship-with-partisanship/>; Thomas K. Lindsay and Lucy Meckler, “*Action Civics*,” “*New Civics*,” “*Civic Engagement*,” and “*Project-Based Civics*”: *Advances in Civic Education?* (Texas Public Policy Foundation, 2020), <https://www.texaspolicy.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Lindsay-Meckler-Action-Civics.pdf>.

⁷ Hawaii Democracy Course Featured in National Civics Education Report, Civil Beat, March 19, 2014, <https://www.civilbeat.org/2014/03/hawaii-democracy-course-featured-in-national-civics/>.

- (B) participation in any internship, practicum, or similar activity involving social or public policy advocacy[.]⁸

We believe that these components of the existing and proposed Texas standards, especially the direction to “choose and implement a solution,” ought to be removed, so as to bring Texas’ social studies standards into conformity with the requirements of H.B. 3979 (2021). If you cannot make this removal in this immediate round of revision, we urge that you initiate a new round of revision as soon as possible, to ensure that the Texas social studies standards unambiguously comply with H.B. 3979’s legislative mandate.

Respectfully yours,



Peter Wood
President, National Association of Scholars



David Randall
Executive Director, Civics Alliance

⁸ An Act Relating to the Social Studies Curriculum in Public Schools, H.B. 3979 (2021), <https://capitol.texas.gov/tlodocs/87R/billtext/pdf/HB03979F.pdf#navpanes=0>.