

**MEMORANDUM**

**TO:** Members, Utah State Board of Education

**FROM:** Jennifer Throndsen  
Literacy Coordinator

**DATE:** October 8-9, 2015

**INFORMATION:** Status Update on Secondary Social Studies Standards Revision

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**Background:**

The draft Secondary Social Studies Standards are nearing completion.

**Key Points:**

The writing committee has been revising the standards for Social Studies. The writers will share an update on the revision and the plans for soliciting stakeholder feedback.

**Anticipated Action:**

Information will be provided to the Standards and Assessment Committee regarding the status of the revision of the Secondary Social Studies Standards.

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# Update on Social Studies Core Performance Standards Revision



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The social studies core standards revision writing team has developed initial working drafts in all six of the core courses required of Utah students: Utah Studies, US History 1 and 2, Geography, World Civilizations, and U.S. Government and Citizenship.

The writing teams are working with the goal of the completion of drafts for the November, 2015 board meeting. Those drafts will be presented to the board for consideration. If approved, the revision will be open for public comment and further revision, as necessary, before final board approval in March, 2016.

The beginning of the revision process for social studies overlapped with the creation of the Standards Review Committee. The Standards Review Committee met in October, 2014 and March, 2015. This committee made recommendations that were submitted in April of 2015. Those recommendations have been taken into account in the core drafts. In addition, the writing team has and will continue to solicit feedback from stakeholders.

**Constants**

There are six courses required of secondary students. Much of the course content has not been changed during this revision. Students will still take a foundational social studies course in Utah Studies that provides rich content about Utah as well as essential social studies skills in history, geography, economics, and civics. Students will receive additional instruction in U.S. History, Geography, World Civilizations, and U.S. Government and Citizenship.

There are also specific content expectations in social studies instruction that will not change. Many of them are codified in statute, for they represent ideas and aspirations central to the mission of public education. These include patriotic education, civic knowledge and competencies, and economic knowledge such as understanding the free market system and the role of entrepreneurs. The writing team has referred to all statutory requirements regarding social studies education.

**Proposed Revisions**

The writing team has emphasized the four disciplines of history, geography, economics, and civics throughout each course. Utah Studies is the course where these discipline-specific ways of thinking are introduced, and the writing team is intent on continuing to develop those discipline-specific skills in each subsequent course. Economic concepts, for example, are relevant in history and geography courses, and geography is relevant in a course which may focus mainly on history.

The writing team is also emphasizing depth of knowledge and vibrant cognitive rigor. This will support the learning of the content and the development of the skills necessary for success in college, career, and civic life. Students need to be able to read, write, and speak with clarity, make sound analyses based on reliable data, and conduct independent research.

One significant change is the distilling of the standards into strands and standards. The strand introduces the essential ideas that are worthy of study, and the standards clearly state the student proficiencies required for successful mastery of the strand. Removing some standards, elevating objectives to standards when appropriate, and removing indicators has made for a cleaner, clearer document.

This emphasis on proficiency is an essential change in the current drafts. Each standard has a direct expectation of rigorous student performance. The standards emphasize the clear demonstrations of competency that are the hallmark of an effective classroom.

Performance standards complement the concept of Student Learning Objectives, a centerpiece of the Educator Effectiveness initiative spearheaded by the USOE. For teachers of non-tested subjects and grades, performance standards should prove useful in helping set clear benchmarks for student learning.

### **A Sample Standard**

Here is a sample standard as an example of these changes:

World Civilizations:

Current Standard (Objective): Students will explore man's domestication of plants and animals.

New Standard: Students will compare life before and after the Neolithic Revolution and cite the most significant effects of the revolution on the development of civilization(s).

- The new standard is *assessable*, replacing the verb "explore" with "compare."
- The new standard is *historical*, using "compare life before and after."
- The new standard addresses *significant social studies themes* of "cause-and-effect" and "continuity and change."
- The new standard asks for *higher order thinking* with a more cognitively-rigorous depth of knowledge level. When students "compare" and "cite the most significant effects" they conduct analysis and evaluation.
- Finally, the new standard requires *interpretive skills* on the part of students when they have to "cite the most significant effect."

### **Stakeholder Feedback**

A survey has been created to allow for specific feedback about any core standards as well as to gather general comments. The standards review committee as well as LEA social studies leaders have been given access to the core drafts so the writers can move forward with the best feedback possible. The writers hope to garner more constructive feedback from as many stakeholders as possible in an effort to produce the best standards possible for Utah students.