



Virginia's Students Deserve a Diverse, Inclusive and Culturally-Sustaining Social Studies and History Curriculum

IDRA Testimony against Revised 2022 History and Social Science Standards of Learning submitted by Terrence Wilson, J.D., to the Virginia Board of Education, November 17, 2022

President Gecker and Members of the Virginia Board of Education:

My name is Terrence Wilson, J.D., and I am the regional policy and community engagement director at IDRA, a national, non-partisan, education non-profit committed to achieving equal educational opportunity for every child through strong public schools that prepare all students to access and succeed in college.

IDRA opposes the second revision of the Virginia History and Social Studies Standards of Learning because it does not sufficiently address the experiences of historically-marginalized populations, it de-emphasizes the experiences of African Americans in contradiction with the recommendations of a previous expert commission, and it creates unrealistic expectations for educators.

The original revision represents a much more comprehensive, diverse and inclusive approach to teaching social studies and history in Virginia. We urge that the Board of Education reject the second revision and adopt the original revisions to the Virginia Social Studies and History Standards.

The Second Revision Fails to Accurately Address the Experiences of Historically-Marginalized Groups

The second revision of the Virginia History and Social Studies Standards of Learning presents a Eurocentric view of history and social studies that de-emphasizes discussion of the experiences of several different historically-marginalized groups, including Native American and Indigenous people, Asian Americans, Latinos and LGBTQIA+ people. Virginia schools are incredibly diverse, and many students identify as members of these groups. An effective education requires that students' cultural identities be reflected in the main curriculum. It is impossible to have an accurate understanding of social studies and history without an understanding of the contributions of these groups (Caldera & Rodríguez, 2021).

There are several examples where the second revision waters down or removes information that would help students gain a better understanding of these groups. For example, the original standards require students to examine the experiences of different Indigenous Peoples of North America independent of their interactions with Virginia's early settlers or interactions with American government systems. In contrast, the second revision speaks of these groups largely in reference to conflicts with early settlers and the U.S. government through forced relocation via

the Trail of Tears. This change threatens the ability of students to understand these groups as independent communities with rich and complex histories and lives and, instead, suggests that their stories are only important to the extent they relate to European conflicts and historical figures.

Furthermore, the second revision requires students to have an appreciation and understanding of holidays like Columbus Day and Thanksgiving without requiring students to critically examine the impact of Christopher Columbus and European colonization, the negative impacts of contact between Indigenous people and early settlers, and the move toward the establishment of Indigenous People's day. Without these topics, students will be left with an incomplete picture of the experience of Indigenous Americans.

Another example of deficiencies in the second revision regards how it presents the experiences of Asian American and Pacific Islanders. In the second revision, the only treatment of the experience of this group comes in coverage of U.S. internment camps of Japanese Americans and the contributions of the 442nd Regimental Combat Team during WWII. The original revision requires that students "contextualize various information sources and data to understand the perspectives, lived experiences of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders to explain significant work, legislation and U.S. Supreme Court rulings, such as *United States vs. Wong Kim Ark* (1898), The Yellow Power Movement, the Japanese American Citizens' League and *Lau v. Nichols*." Again, an understanding of Virginia and U.S. history is incomplete without an understanding of the full experiences of Asian American and Pacific Islanders.

The experiences of Latinos in Virginia and American history are also inadequately covered in the second revision of the standards. Although these students represent over 18% of the student population, the contributions and experiences of this group are completely left out of the second revision of the standards. The original revision requires that students "analyze significant legislation, Supreme Court rulings, and other data to explain the impact of activities and actions, such as the Development, Relief, and Education or Alien Minors (DREAM) Act, League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), *Mendez v. Westminster*, the United Farm Workers Association and the Brown Berets on Latinx community's efforts to obtain equal rights, opportunities and protections."

Similarly, the experiences and history of LGBTQ+ individuals are left out of the second revision of the standards. In the original revision, students were required to "analyze significant legislation, Supreme Court rulings, and other data to explain the impact of actions, such as the Stonewall Uprising, Gay Pride Movement, 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell' as U.S. military policy, the *Marriage Equality Act*, and *Obergefell v. Hodges* (2015) on the LGBTQ+ community's efforts to obtain equal rights, opportunities and protections." A comprehensive understanding of Virginia and U.S. history requires students to learn this information.

The Second Revision Deemphasizes the Experiences and Contributions of African Americans in Virginia and U.S. History

The second revision does not adequately address the experience and contributions of African Americans in Virginia and in the United States. The blueprint for how to improve the standards in this regard has already been developed. In 2020, IDRA facilitated the conversations of the Virginia Commission on African American History Education in the Commonwealth. The final report of this commission of experts makes several recommendations for technical edits and revisions to the social studies and history standards that are aimed at "making the standards more inclusive of African American history and that provide opportunities for students to engage the content deeply,

drawing connections to its relevance in our contemporary communities” (Virginia Commission, 2020).

Among those recommendations was to include additional information about the independent experience of Africans who would be enslaved, contributions of African Americans to all war efforts, including the Civil War, and a deeper understanding of the contributions of African Americans to political, economic and social life during the Reconstruction era and backlash to these contributions.

These recommendations and several others from that Commission should be incorporated into the second revision as the current treatment of these topics related to African Americans is deficient or absent.

Without Additional Support, the Second Revision’s Guiding Principles Create Potential Confusion for Educators Seeking to Provide a Comprehensive, Inclusive Treatment of Social Studies and History

The current guiding principles articulate several different requirements for educators teaching history and social studies in Virginia. Specifically, the guiding principles require that “teachers must facilitate open and balanced discussions on difficult topics, including discrimination and racism, and present learning opportunities without personal or political bias” (The Guiding Principles, 2022).

The requirement to provide balanced discussions may create confusion when presenting topics, such as discrimination and racism. Educators may find it difficult to provide a balanced treatment to clear examples of racism and bigotry. Likewise, educators, particularly educators of color, have firsthand experiences that are relevant to conversations about racism and discrimination that they may have to censor under this provision. To effectively have these conversations, educators should be trained in culturally-sustaining pedagogy and educational practice to effectuate a learning environment that supports all students.

Recommendations

- Incorporate the original revision to Virginia’s History and Social Studies Standards.
- Incorporate more about the experiences of historically-marginalized groups including Indigenous Americans, Asian American and Pacific Islanders, Latino Americans and LGBTQ+ people.
- Incorporate recommendations for African American history made in the Final Report of the Virginia Commission on African American History Education in the Commonwealth
- Revise language in the guiding principles referencing balance and lack of personal impact when discussing discrimination and racism, and provide educators tasked with implementing these standards with training on culturally-sustaining pedagogy and educational practices.

IDRA is available for any questions or further resources that we can provide. Thank you for your consideration. For more information, please contact Terrence Wilson, J.D., IDRA regional policy and community engagement director, at terrence.wilson@idra.org.

Resources

Caldera, A., & Rodríguez, N. (March 2021). Students of Color Deserve Culturally Responsive Instruction and Ethnic Studies. *IDRA Newsletter*. <https://idra.news/NLMar21b>

VDOE. (November 10, 2022). Final Redraft of VA HSS Standards for K-12. Virginia Department of Education.

<https://doe.virginia.gov/boe/meetings/2022/11-nov/item-i-draft-hss-standards.pdf>

VDOE. (2020). Final Report, Virginia Commission on African American History Education in the Commonwealth.

VDOE. (2022). The Guiding Principles for Virginia's 2022 History and Social Science Standards Revisions.

<https://doe.virginia.gov/boe/meetings/2022/11-nov/item-i-hss-standards-guiding-principles.pdf>

IDRA is an independent, non-profit organization led by Celina Moreno, J.D. Our mission is to achieve equal educational opportunity for every child through strong public schools that prepare all students to access and succeed in college. IDRA strengthens and transforms public education by providing dynamic training; useful research, evaluation, and frameworks for action; timely policy analyses; and innovative materials and programs.