

Senate Bill 1031

Position Paper in Favor

Texas Social Studies Supervisors Association

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I. Introduction

"A popular government without popular information or the means of acquiring it is but a prologue to Farce or Tragedy or perhaps both. Knowledge will forever govern ignorance, and a people who mean to be their own Governors must arm themselves with the power knowledge gives."
James Madison, 1788

In Texas, our students may be learning more about reading, science and mathematics, but they may have little time to study important knowledge and concepts from U.S. history and citizenship. Fifth grade social studies is fighting to maintain its place in the curriculum as schools allocate more time and attention to reading, science and math instruction to meet state and federal goals for student achievement. We may wish otherwise, but what is tested is taught and in many elementary classrooms in Texas social studies has been put on the back burner in favor of subjects that are tested. The Texas Social Studies Supervisors Association is passionate about this content and believes the curriculum must be taught, taught well, and assessed at a high level of depth and complexity.

II. What do we teach in 5th Grade Social Studies in Texas?

In 5th Grade, students learn about the history of the United States from its early beginnings to the present with a focus on colonial times through the 20th century. Students examine the importance of effective leadership in a democratic society and identify important leaders in the national government. Students examine fundamental rights guaranteed in the Constitution and Bill of Rights. More specifically, students learn:

- a. Instruction in U.S. history and citizenship
- b. Why the colonists came to America
- c. Colonial grievances and how they were addressed in the Constitution and Bill of Rights
- d. Analysis of the fundamental freedoms and ideas of the founding fathers

- e. The founding documents, including the Declaration of Independence
- f. Causes of and important events in the American Revolution
- g. Economic principles of free enterprise and supply and demand; the difference in wants and needs; historical economic crises and how they were addressed
- h. Sectionalism, slavery and the causes of the American Civil War
- i. Manifest Destiny and geographic influences on American history
- j. Causes and effects of mid 19th Century and 20th Century U.S. immigration
- k. The role of the U.S in the 20th Century
- l. Civics related discussions, simulations, and more.

History, citizenship, geography, culture, science and technology and economic content standards provide for a clear vision for 5th Grade Social Studies through the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) which is the required curriculum.

III. Why is teaching social studies in 5th grade such a struggle and why is it so important?

Teaching all of the 5th Grade Social Studies TEKS is mandated by the Texas Education Code. All students must have the “opportunity to learn” the curriculum and time to teach social studies at 5th grade is not safeguarded. The Texas Education Code requires the following:

§ 28.002. REQUIRED CURRICULUM. (a) Each school district that offers kindergarten through grade 12 shall offer, as a required curriculum:

- (1) a foundation curriculum that includes:
 - (A) English language arts;
 - (B) mathematics;
 - (C) science; and
 - (D) social studies, consisting of Texas, United States, and world history, government, and geography;

Social studies is part of the required curriculum in Texas and should be taught every day and in every grade. However, since the implementation of *No Child Left Behind*, the amount of time teachers spend on social studies, geography, civics, and other related subjects has decreased at the elementary level, while time spent on reading,

mathematics, and science has increased. Again, what is tested is taught and in many elementary classrooms in Texas social studies has been put on the back burner in favor of subjects that are tested. This is especially true among schools with high minority populations. In this case, the impact of the “Matthew Effect” should be seriously considered. It states that early learning prepares for future learning and provides the foundations upon which teachers and students can scaffold learning. Middle school and high school teachers must have students who have the basic content knowledge and skills in order for them to become successful learners. “Most U.S. high school seniors have a poor grasp of the nation’s history, and their knowledge hasn’t improved in seven years” (NAEP, 2001.) More instructional time in social studies would help reduce this trend.

What is accomplished during instructional time in 5th Grade Social Studies is equally important. The Bradley Commission (1988) in the publication, *Building a History Curriculum: Guidelines for Teaching History in School*, acknowledged the critical value of traditional historical study to the education of Americans. The Commission recognized teachers as the most important ingredient in any instructional situation and developed curricular guidelines for the professional development of K-12 history teachers. The Commission introduced a historical mindset featuring analytical thinking or *habits of mind* as a national educational goal. The thirteen historical *habits of mind* identified for teachers focused on instructional practices and integration of content. Teachers were urged to help students become active learners who understood 1) how things happen and how things change, 2) that human intentions matter, and 3) that consequences are shaped by the means with which they are carried out. Teachers must help students “read widely and critically in order to recognize the difference between fact

and conjecture, between evidence and assertion, and thereby to frame useful questions” (Bradley Commission, 1988). The 5th Grade Social Studies curriculum must be taught, taught well and assessed at a high level of depth and complexity.

IV. Why does it make sense to assess social studies at 5th grade and science at 4th grade?

At both 4th and 5th grades, the Science TEKS concentrate on many of the same processes and concepts – the scientific method, field and laboratory investigations, systems, energy, change, force and motion, for example. At both 4th and 5th grades, the Social Studies TEKS address critically different content, time periods, people, locations and significant eras. The content for 4th Grade Social Studies is Texas History, while the content for 5th Grade Social Studies is U.S. History. The state has attempted to assess Texas History at middle school in the past and found that students who moved to Texas from other states or countries during the school year were at a significant disadvantage since they did not have the “opportunity to learn” the Texas history content as provided by the Texas Education Code.

V. Why is there a national movement to assess social studies at elementary school and who is involved?

The belittling of U.S. history and citizenship education at elementary school is an issue that many people care about. Historian David McCullough, Former Associate Justice of the Supreme Court, Sandra Day O’Connor, and former Governor and Superintendent of Schools of LA Unified, Roy Romer, are spearheading efforts on a national level to assure that citizenship and U.S. history are taught and assessed in elementary school by including social studies assessment in the reauthorization of NCLB. In *Not By Math Alone*, an opinion column that appeared in the *Washington Post* on

March 25, 2006, former Associate Justice of the Supreme Court, Sandra Day O'Connor, and former Colorado Governor, Roy Romer, claim, "Most young people today simply do not have an adequate understanding of how our government and political system work, and they are thus not well prepared to participate as citizens." As the 2003 report *The Civic Mission of Schools* noted, "Individuals do not automatically become free and responsible citizens, but must be educated for citizenship." O'Connor and Romer were involved in the development of the report and also state, "That means civic learning – educating students for democracy – needs to be on par with other academic subjects."

In the May, 2006 issue of the *ASCD Education Update*, the title and subtitle say it all, "Social Studies Jockeys for Position in a Narrowing Curriculum – NCLB a Thief of Time." In the introduction to the article, the authors state, "The arts, foreign languages and elementary social studies have taken a backseat to subjects tested on state and national exams, such as math and reading."

Roy Romer asserts in *Saving Democracy, Pupil by Pupil*, "Quite often, the tests that states will use for No Child Left Behind will be only on certain core subjects, such as language arts and math and sometimes science; and school systems, if not careful, can be warped into the neglect of social studies." O'Connor and Romer are the national spokespersons for a concerted pushback against these trends calling itself the Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools (www.civicmissionofschools.org.)

The decisions made by the Texas Legislature on this matter during the 80th Session will affect our state on a national level as well. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) is currently given in Texas for math and reading and in many other areas, social studies is included in the national assessment battery. The content for the

social studies NAEP for elementary is U.S. history. If we eventually give the NAEP for elementary social studies in Texas we will be at a great disadvantage compared with other states if our 5th grade curriculum is not taught, taught well and assessed at a high level of depth and complexity.

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