

Introduction to Minnesota Academic Standards in Social Studies

Social Studies Standards Background

The current social studies standards are the *Minnesota K-12 Academic Standards in Social Studies (2011)*. They were fully implemented during the 2013-14 school year. The next review of social studies standards will be during the 2020-21 school year, with full implementation around 2023-24.

Historical Context

The *Minnesota K-12 Academic Standards in Social Studies (2011)* set the statewide expectations for K-12 student achievement in the disciplines of citizenship and government, economics, geography and history (United States and world). The standards are guided by a vision of citizenship and college- and career-readiness, and identify the academic knowledge and skills that prepare students for postsecondary education, work, and civic life in the 21st century.

The standards require students to understand the facts, concepts, principles and perspectives that shape the social studies disciplines. In addition to mastering a body of knowledge, students must be able to apply their understanding to complex situations and contexts, some of which are yet to be envisioned. To prepare for these future challenges, the standards also require students to think critically about important issues and communicate their findings, and engage in the processes of problem solving and discipline-based inquiry.

The standards represent the minimum requirements; sites may offer courses in additional disciplines including psychology, sociology, archaeology, and anthropology. Curriculum and instructional approaches are determined at the local level.

Foundational Documents for Development of the Social Studies Standards

A variety of sources were consulted in the development of the social studies standards. National documents and reports on social studies education reviewed included:

- National standards documents in each discipline.
- National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Frameworks and the “Nation’s Report Card” for Civics, Economics, Geography, and U.S. History (World History was not available).
- National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) themes and positions statements.
- Exemplary standards from other states, including those from Massachusetts, Virginia, and several other states that were ranked highly by the Fordham Foundation and the American Federation of Teachers.

Other important resources included:

- Standards developed by Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL).

- Discipline-specific organizations such as the Center for Civic Education, National Center for History in the Schools, Council on Economic Education, and Geography Education National Implementation Project.
- More than 1,100 comments submitted by the public online and at Town Hall meetings across the state.
- Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) curricula.
- Analysis and advice provided by numerous content and pedagogy experts.

Organization

The social studies content is organized into K-12 strands, substrands, academic standards and benchmarks, which can be found listed on pages 10-16 of the [Minnesota K-12 Academic Standards in Social Studies \(2011\)](#).

Strands - The broadest level of organization at each grade level is represented by the four disciplinary *strands*: 1) Citizenship and Government; 2) Economics; 3) Geography; and, 4) History. Although the standards in this document are organized by these discipline, they may be delivered in an interdisciplinary context.

Substrands - The content for each strand is organized into several categories or *substrands* that contain 10 to 23 standards.

The first substrand in each discipline indicates key skills or processes that, in most cases, should be applied to the content in other benchmarks rather than taught as a standalone item. For example, students could learn about the powers and operations of local government in Minnesota (content from benchmark 9.1.4.6.8) while doing a project about a local policy issue (civic skills from benchmark 9.1.1.1.4).

Academic Standards - Each substrand contains 10 to 23 *standards* - summary descriptions of student learning in a required or elective content area; broad descriptions of major concepts and skills. As standards represent “the big picture,” they are repeated at multiple grade levels.

Benchmarks - Each standard is composed of one or more grade-level *benchmarks* - the specific knowledge or skills that a student must master to complete part of an academic standard by the end of the grade level or grade band.

Benchmarks are unique to each grade level and represent the learning that is to be mastered by the end of a particular grade (in grades K-8) or grade band (in grades 9-12). The benchmarks for each standard represent a progression of learning that spans several grades.

Examples - Many of the benchmarks include *examples* that clarify the meaning of the benchmark or indicate the level of student understanding. The examples may suggest learning activities or instructional topics. They are NOT intended to be directives for curriculum or a comprehensive fulfillment of the benchmarks.

The Literacy in History/Social Studies standards - Public school students in grades 6-12 must complete the Literacy in History/Social Studies standards listed in the [Minnesota K-12 Academic Standards in English Language Arts \(2010\)](#) (pages 80-90).

How to Read the Standards

Each benchmark for a given standard are designated by a five-part code. For example, the code **5.3.4.10.1** is read as follows:

- The 5 refers to grade 5;
- The 3 refers to the third strand, *Geography*;
- The 4 refers to the fourth substrand, *Human Environment Interaction*;
- The 10 refers to the tenth geography standard, *The meaning, use, distribution and importance of resources changes over time*.
- The 1 refers to the first benchmark for that standard, *Explain how geographic factors affected land use in the North African colonies*.

Grade	Strand	Substrand	Standard	Content Area	Benchmark
5	3. Geography	4. Human Environment Interaction	10. The meaning, use, distribution and importance of resources changes over time.	5.3.4.10.1	Explain how geographic factors affected land use in the North American colonies. <i>For example: Geographic factors – climate, landforms, availability of natural resources.</i>

Codes that begin with “0” indicate benchmarks that are to be mastered in Kindergarten, while those that begin with “9” indicate benchmarks that are to be mastered in grades 9-12.

Supports for Instruction and Curriculum

The Minnesota Department of Education works in collaboration with the [Minnesota Center for Social Studies Education](#) (CSSE) to provide professional development on social studies standards implementation, best practices, and research-based instructional strategies for K-12 educators. The links below provide access to the collaborating organizations for CSSE.

- [Learning Law and Democracy Foundation](#)
- [Minnesota Alliance for Geographic Education](#)
- [Minnesota Council for the Social Studies](#)
- [Minnesota Council on Economic Education](#)
- [Minnesota Humanities Center](#)
- [Minnesota Council for History Education](#)
- [Minnesota Historical Society](#)