

Social Studies TEKS Revision Committee:

Thank you all for asking me to be part of this interesting updating the TEKS effort. I've enjoyed being involved so far. I look forward to actually meeting the TEKS authors/revisers and hope what I've written here will be helpful to you.

Even though there is no place on the sheet of questions I am to address that asks for overall comments, I am starting with some.

First: I am impressed by the thoroughness and broadscope of the Social Studies TEKS. Pretty much all the bases seem to have been touched, and there is very little of the "memorize this date" sort of expectation of kids. If a teacher were able to cover all the academic and skill based TEKS in his or her classroom, I think students would graduate from high school well prepared for success in life. (That probably sounds a bit dramatic, but I mean it.)

Second: However, that comment must be followed by my concern that it is not possible for all these TEKS to be covered. I was especially shocked by grade 5; it has nearly 90 "student expectations" listed. While some seem to me, as one who has never taught children, reasonable for a 10 year old, some sound like test questions I give my college freshmen. And, regardless of difficulty, there are just too many.

Third: As part of my preparation for this assignment, I researched the Social Studies TAKS. Everything I found indicates that there is no statewide social studies test given until the 8th grade. When I called my niece, who teaches 3rd grade at a Title One school, she openly admitted she spends most of her available time stressing tested subjects. Since passing the TAKS is so important to her and her school, she gives very little time to social studies. (She actually apologized to me for how little her kids learn about the subject.) Were I in her situation, as I'm sure many Texas elementary teachers are, I would probably do the same thing.

From many years working with my department's secondary school certification students, I also know that the 10th grade Social Studies TAKS emphasizes the United States. This doesn't make much sense to me since the sophomores being tested have spent the last two years studying the world. Shouldn't the TEKS and TAKS stay closer together?

In answer to the questions:

1) Do the TEKS ensure that SS concepts are presented in an accurate and factual manner? Do the standards promote ideological neutrality...."

Yes, there are many SE listed that allow for various opinions to be researched and presented. For example, "*express and defend a point of view on an issue of contemporary interest in the U.S.*" (Government, 17C) and "*compare different points of view on geographic issues*" (World

Geography, 15 C)

My only criticism involves international connections. There aren't many, and teenagers rarely have the foundation to judge events in other places with sufficient information. I think some of the TEKS don't help this.

For example: "identify examples of political, economic and social oppression and violations of human rights..." followed by examples of communist nations. (World History, 18C) This would normally not be a problem, since obviously none of the countries listed is one we want to emulate politically or socially; however, many non-communist nations would also serve as appropriate examples for that statement. As it is, so few non-European nations are mentioned in the secondary TEKS, I don't think "ideological neutrality" is evident here.

Of course, the instructor is the real determiner of accuracy and openness. The TEKS will support a teacher who wants to make his or her classroom a place for disseminating factually accurate information and a safe-haven for students' expressing varied political and social opinions.

2) Is a complete and logical development of SS concepts followed for each grade level or course?

I am especially impressed by the K-3rd connections. Most seem to follow in a reasonable and logical manner.

For example: "explain why people have jobs," (K, 7B), "describe the requirements for various jobs. (1st, 9A), "explain how work provides income..." (2nd, 9A), identify ways of earning, spending and saving money" (3rd, 6A)

However, the links are more difficult to see in secondary. Can a 17 year old really remember and connect with much factual information about American history she learned at 13? I teach honors freshmen who, smart, hard-working, and ambitious for good grades as they are, sometime look at me like I 'm introducing Mandarin. *Yes, they've heard of the Stamp Act; well, they think they've heard of the Stamp Act.* I know it is not up to this committee to recommend rearrangement of classes, but I don't think it's reasonable to assume that just tying 8th grade TEKS directly to 11 grade TEKS will create a smooth transition, or help bridge a teenager's knowledge and appreciation of our national past.

The government TEKS seem to be especially well connected. By the time a student takes senior level Government, he has been introduced to major terms and concepts in several previous grades. TEKS have addressed the Constitution, its amendments and various other politically significant documents in at least three other secondary courses. So by the time an older teenager sees these again, he can evaluate them at a more sophisticated level.. *For example: (Gov, 8 A-F)*

3) Are historically significant events and people included..."

I think this is fine. Obviously, updating needs to occur, but the major events, especially of U.S. history, seem the most significant ones to emphasize.

I do, however, think more names after the “such as” in many TEKS need to be added, or these examples should be removed entirely. Teachers might be encouraged to select their own examples. I am a great fan of George Washington; I have two pictures of him in my office. However, he is mentioned more than anyone else as representative of some positive American trait, etc. Perhaps an occasional local hero, someone the kids might actually know, would be appropriate. Also, the TEKS might remain more current if some of the people used as examples were more varied and “in the news.”

An obvious attempt has been made to include minorities and women as examples. But again, impressive as she was, there are more Texas women than just Barbara Jordan.

4). Have the correct vocabulary and terminology been used?

Over all, yes. Perhaps, as an outsider, I am misinterpreting some terms, but a few seem inappropriate. *For example: “compare the regions of Texas with regions of the U.S. and other parts of the world...” (4th, 7C).* First, I think “other” needs to be added before “regions of the U.S.,” as we are part of the U.S. But most problematic to me is the use of “compare.” I can’t find anything in the earlier grades that implies kids are learning about regions of the world. So how can they “compare” when they get to 4th grade? Shouldn’t they “identify” before they “compare?”

There are lots of “analyze” verbs, too. *For example: “analyze the consequences of human modification of the environment of Texas, past and present.” (4th, 9C)* The closest connection I can find to this is a SE that 3rd graders “compare how people in different communities adapt and modify the physical environment.” (3rd, 4B). I am not clear how, as 4th graders, they are supposed to “analyze” regions they haven’t already studied. While terms such as this may not be as big an issue with older students, it does seem one for elementary kids.

Why is the word “capitalism” never mentioned? (I can only find “free enterprise.”) Is this an unpopular word? In my survey class, I stress that the great majority of immigrants, from Jamestown to now, saw/see the U.S. primarily as a place offering personal economic advancement and the chance to secure private property. Isn’t that the philosophical foundation of capitalism? Shouldn’t the students understand a word used, both positively and negatively, all the time?

Finally, what does “human processes” mean? It’s used several places in several grades, but it means nothing to me. I even Googled it, but that didn’t help much. (“A process in which human being are involved”?)

5. Are there specific areas that need to be updated.

Obviously, the TEKS (or examples) that use former communist nations need to be changed. I also question a stress on the Cold War. (*US II, 6*) I, myself, have really cut back on the Cold War part of my survey course. Almost all my students were born after the Berlin Wall was destroyed; what was a huge event in my Baby Boomer life has very little obvious connection to their own. I

suggest some TEKS that highlight Arab nations and culture, and a more serious examination of Islam. I am sure many high school teachers are already doing what I'm suggesting, but there should be TEKS to support their efforts.

There are court cases that could be removed, such as Bakke, and replaced with more recent, significant ones. (*US II, 17A*)

Since Federal law now mandates observations of Constitution Day, maybe some TEKS directly related to that could be added. (Or perhaps some current TEKS could be modified to include CD.)

6 Are the SS concepts/content statements grade-level appropriate?

I really can't answer this. Other than being a mom and having volunteered with a kindergarten teacher for years, I have no experience that enables me to say anything worthwhile. However, I do seriously wonder how a teenager can master, "*major issues and events of World War II.*," (*U.S. II, 6B*) which is only one of the 27 history SE for which she is responsible. One of my own colleagues teaches an entire course on that subject alone.

At the secondary level, there are many SE that seem way too big and complicated to be successfully taught or learned.

7. Are the Student Expectations clear and specific? Do they focus on academic content?

Overall, yes. My primary concern, as I've stated before, is that many of the secondary ones seem unrealistic. For example: "*Summarize the major political, economic, and cultural developments of civilizations in China, India and Japan.*" (*World Hist., 6C*) Good grief!

8. Are the SS skills statements...handled properly?

The SS skills are the very best part of the TEKS! They bridge into the next level, from elementary grades on, often without a single modification. Some become more sophisticated as students mature. They are very good.

I don't expect students to enter my classroom with a storehouse of specific, factual information about history or government or geography. (Again, they last studied the Stamp Act over five years before.) But if they come to me able to use and evaluate sources, recognize bias, collect and research appropriate materials, etc., they will succeed in my course and, probably, in any university class.

9. Do the standards promote an appreciation of the basic values of our state and nation...?

Yes. From expecting kids to recognize the flag at 5 and understand the Preamble of the Constitution at 18, the TEKS emphasize our basic (generally accepted) heritage and values.

I'm not sure how Texas values are much different than our national ones. (Is this referring to our **Western heritage traits.**)

10. Do the standards promote citizenship, patriotism ...free enterprise?

Yes. They emphasize the positive qualities of each of those.

11. Do you have any other suggestions...[for how] TEKS can be improved.?

I've given most of the ones I really think are significant in the comments above.

This is more of an observation than a suggestion, but the individual SE don't always "match." For example: "*identify reasons for European exploration and colonization of North America,*" (U.S. II, 2A) seems reasonable and narrow enough in content. However, in the same section, is a SE to "analyze the issues of the Philadelphia Convention of 1787, including major compromises, and arguments for and against ratification" (U.S. II, 4D) That is a huge expectation and doesn't seem anything like the earlier SE. The former might take a teacher and his class 30 minutes and limited research. The latter could take days and demand much investigation. It wouldn't matter except that the teacher is also expected to cover 32 other SE in the history (alone) section of this course.

Although I've never studied or taught Psychology or Sociology, there were many SE in those courses that seemed to tie in well with the core SS courses..

I'm not always sure what was being covered in the "culture" sections.

I'd add more court cases. Students usually like court cases; they're fun to teach, and can easily be used as springboards into major historical and political issues.

12. Is the subject area aligned horizontally and vertically?

As I understand the use of those terms, yes.

Lybeth Hodges
Professor of History
Texas Woman's University