

Questions provided to the SBOE expert reviewers for the TEKS for Social Studies

Responses provided by James B. Kracht
Expert Reviewer Nominated by SBOE Members Pat Hardy and Bob Craig

1.a. Do the TEKS ensure that social studies concepts are presented in an accurate and factual manner?

Yes. The language of the TEKS for Social Studies ensures that the history and social science facts, concepts, and understandings are clearly identified for teachers, curriculum developers, and textbook publishers. Subject matter experts from the disciplines of geography, history, economics, political science, and other social science disciplines were consulted by the TEKS for Social Studies writing team regarding the accuracy and appropriateness of the history and social science concepts selected for inclusion in the K-12 standards and student expectations.

1.b. Do the standards promote ideological neutrality by balancing people/events from various sides of the political spectrum.

The TEKS for Social Studies writing team attempted to maintain ideological neutrality throughout grades K-12. Reviews of the TEKS by teachers, social studies experts, and subject matter experts helped to assure that the TEKS were not biased toward a particular ideological framework. The TEKS for Social Studies were reviewed and commented on by educators, parents, and the public at numerous open sessions across the state prior to adoption by the SBOE. Comments made during the public sessions were examined by the TEKS for Social Studies writing team and incorporated into the TEKS document.

While care was taken to maintain ideological neutrality and feedback from extensive public reviews were incorporated into the TEKS, the review team should be aware that some have pointed out that the Texas standards take a very positive view of Texas and U.S. history and sometimes ignore or neglect to call attention to more difficult times when historical figures made errors or showed weaknesses and when events show Texas and the U.S. in a less than positive light. See Chester E. Finn, Ed., (2003). *Effective State Standards for U.S. History*. NY: Thomas E. Fordham Institute, pp. 76-78. http://www.edexcellence.net/detail/news.cfm?news_id=320 The review team might want to consider whether sections of the TEKS that focus on Texas and U.S. History maintain the ideological neutrality necessary to effective instruction for citizenship. They also might consider whether the inclusion of some carefully selected additional TEKS might help to provide a further balance in the treatment of Texas and U.S. History.

2. Is a complete and logical development of social studies concepts followed for each grade level or course?

The TEKS for Social Studies are well organized and provide a logical development of social studies concepts and understandings at each grade level and course. The concepts and understandings are well supported by appropriate factual information. Although the TEKS for social studies were among the earliest state standards developed in the U.S., the writing team that developed the document benefitted

from having a number of social scientists, classroom teachers, and non-educators on the team. This combination allowed a close examination of the development of the concepts that were included in the TEKS.

3. Are historically significant events and people included at the appropriate grade level or subject, or are there significant omissions of important historical happenings and people?

In most cases, historically significant events and people are included at the appropriate grade levels and in the appropriate courses. There are instances, especially at the primary level (K-3), where the names of people included in the TEKS for Social Studies are not especially appropriate to the content of the TEKS at that particular grade level. In some instances, there are very few age-appropriate materials that are available to supplement textbook content on the individuals that are included in the TEKS. Several of these names were added by outside consultants after the TEKS for Social Studies writing team had completed its work and before the SBOE approved the document. Thus, these names were not subjected to the same level of scrutiny as other portions of the TEKS and may fall short of being entirely appropriate for the grade level. The review team may want to consider some modifications to the specific people included in the TEKS at particular grade levels.

4. Have the correct vocabulary and terminology been used?

Academic terminology changes over time, however, nearly all of the vocabulary and terminology used in the TEKS for Social Studies remains acceptable. One change that the review team might consider is substituting the term “capitalism” for “free enterprise system”. The term “free enterprise system”, based on the work of economists Adam Smith, Ludwig von Mises, Friedrich August von Hayek, and Milton Friedman, is used infrequently by contemporary economists. If one does a Wikipedia search for “free enterprise system”, the search is directed to “capitalism”. While the idea of “free enterprise” or “free market” economy is still valid, the development of terminology in the discipline of economics might cause the review team to consider a change to more contemporary terminology. Modification of this dated terminology might require a change in the Texas Education Code 28.002.

5. Are there areas that need to be updated?

Yes. The review committee should give consideration to updates to the TEKS for Social Studies in grades 4, 5, and 7 and in the secondary U.S. History, World Geography, and World History courses. Significant state, national, and world events that have occurred over the past 12 years provide cause for some modification of the TEKS which were developed in 1996-97 and adopted in 1997. The TEKS for Social Studies for these grade levels and these courses need careful attention to determine whether events and changes in geographic, economic, and political patterns necessitate modification of the student expectations. I would anticipate that the review committee will find that this update can be accomplished with the addition or modification of just a few TEKS.

6. Are the social studies concept/content statements grade-level appropriate.

Grade level appropriateness is very difficult to determine as some educational research supports the idea that even very complex concepts can be taught to young children if enough time, suitable materials, and appropriate instruction are allocated to the task. If grade level appropriateness is taken to mean that there is significant continuity between the TEKS for Social Studies and social studies standards in the majority of other U.S. states, then the content of the TEKS for Social Studies can be considered to be grade-age appropriate.

One change that the review team may wish to consider is the modification of content at Grade 7. Approximately half of the U.S. states, including Texas, focus on a study of the home state at Grade 4. Texas is the only state that includes a study of the home state both at Grade 4 and Grade 7. The original TEKS for Social Studies writing team considered a two-year course of study for Grades 6 and 7 that would have focused on world studies. The current level of world-wide communication, interdependence, and integration might suggest that this idea is once again worthy of consideration. Several states currently have two-year world studies curriculum in place at grades 6 and 7.

Another suggestion the review team might wish to consider is the possible integration of content in Grades 4 and 5 in order to create a two-year course of study focused on Texas and the U.S. Fourth and fifth grade teachers continue to report that it is difficult for nine and ten year old students to develop a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of Texas within the context of the U.S. when dealing only with Texas in grade 4 and only with the U.S. in grade 5. They find that it is very difficult for students to develop an integrated sense of chronology for Texas history and U.S. history. The idea of the two-year integrated course of study was given serious consideration by the original TEKS for social studies writing team. It may be timely for the review team to revisit this idea.

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

Student Expectations vary in their clarity and specificity. For example at Grade 2, in 113.4 (b)(2)(C) the student expectation is “create and interpret timelines”. The SE is clear, but it lacks specificity and has no focus on a particular set of contemporary or historic events. Even though the SE lacks specificity that it is a very valuable and useful student expectation in that it identifies a widely applicable skill that is necessary to understanding chronology. A more specific SE would limit the applicability of the skill and necessitate its repetition throughout the TEKS. Although the SE lacks specificity, teachers easily are able to interpret the SE and help their students apply it.

In a second case at Grade 8 in 113.24 (b)(27)(B) “analyze the relationship between fine arts and continuity and change in the American way of life” one finds a student expectation that lacks both clarity and specificity. Although the SE addresses a relationship that is known to exist, and one that is explicated in the literature of art and the humanities, it provides neither the teacher nor the student with the necessary guidance to identify specific examples illustrative of the relationship. Even national textbook publishers were left wondering what types of content would best represent the relationship identified in the SE.

The review team might choose to review student expectations, weighing their value (importance to the discipline), applicability, clarity, and their specificity. While

more general and widely applicable SEs can be desirable as times, there are instances when they provide so little guidance that it is difficult to apply them to specific content from history and the social sciences and nearly impossible to develop a means of assessment to the particular SE in question.

8. Are the “social studies skills” statements at the end of each grade level/subject handled properly, or is there a better means to address these skills within the standards?

The original TEKS for Social Studies writing team identified and included four types of social studies skills; communication (reading and writing), using technology, locating and analyzing information, and problem solving/decision making. Separating the social studies skills into distinctive categories offered the opportunity to clearly identify the nature of the skills and to convey the idea that the skills were applicable to a broad range of social science and historical content at each grade level.

While it seems that teachers have applied the communication, technology, critical thinking, and problem solving/decision making skills, there is a need for even more emphasis on the development of these skills. The review team might want to give some consideration to the possible relationship between social studies assessments and the importance attached to teaching for the development of skills as well as to the curriculum priority assigned to social studies. It seems clear that greater emphasis on skill development demands greater time and attention to high quality teaching in the social studies.

9. Do the standards promote an appreciation for the basic values of our state and national heritage? Are the significant aspects of our state and national heritage included at the appropriate grade levels?

The TEKS for Social Studies have a clear and convincing focus on the basic values and heritage of our state and nation at each of the grade levels. This focus first is found in the introductory statement for each grade level and course. Following the introduction, statements regarding our state’s basic values and our national heritage can be found throughout the standards and the student expectations. While the citizenship and culture strands of the TEKS contain the majority of standards and student expectations related to state and national values and heritage, similar supportive standards and student expectations can be found within the history, government, and economic strands.

10. Do the standards promote citizenship, patriotism, and an understanding of the benefits of the free enterprise system?

The TEKS for Social Studies are replete with standards and student expectations related to citizenship, patriotism, and the benefits of the free enterprise system. As an example a sample of standards and student expectations are displayed in the table below to illustrate the articulated and continuous emphasis on citizenship and patriotism. A similar display could easily be developed to illustrate expected growth in students’ understanding of the free enterprise system.

Grade	TEK	Standards - Student Expectation
K	10.B	Understands important customs, symbols, and celebrations that

		represent American beliefs and principles and contribute to our national identity – recite the Pledge of Allegiance
2	13.C	Understands characteristics of good citizenship as exemplified by historic figures and ordinary people – identify ordinary people who exemplify good citizenship
4	17.C	Understands important customs, symbols, and celebrations of Texas – recite and explain the meaning of the Pledge to the Texas Flag
6	14.A	Understands the relationship among individual rights, responsibilities, and freedoms in democratic societies – identify and explain the importance of voluntary civic participation in democratic societies
8	20.B	Understands the rights and responsibilities of citizens of the United States – summarize rights guaranteed in the Bill of Rights
U.S. History	18.C	Understands efforts to expand the democratic process – explain how participation in the democratic process reflects our national identity
U.S. Govt.	15.B	Understands the difference between personal and civic responsibilities –evaluate whether and/or when the obligation of citizenship requires that personal desires and interests be subordinated to the public good.

11. Do you have any other suggestions for ways in which the social studies TEKS can be improved?

The TEKS for Social Studies need a very careful and detailed examination by the review team to insure that they are accurate, up to date in terms of content and terminology, and well articulated across grade levels. Consideration should also be given to whether each standard and student expectation is clear and appropriate. Detailed recommendations for modification should be made by the review committee

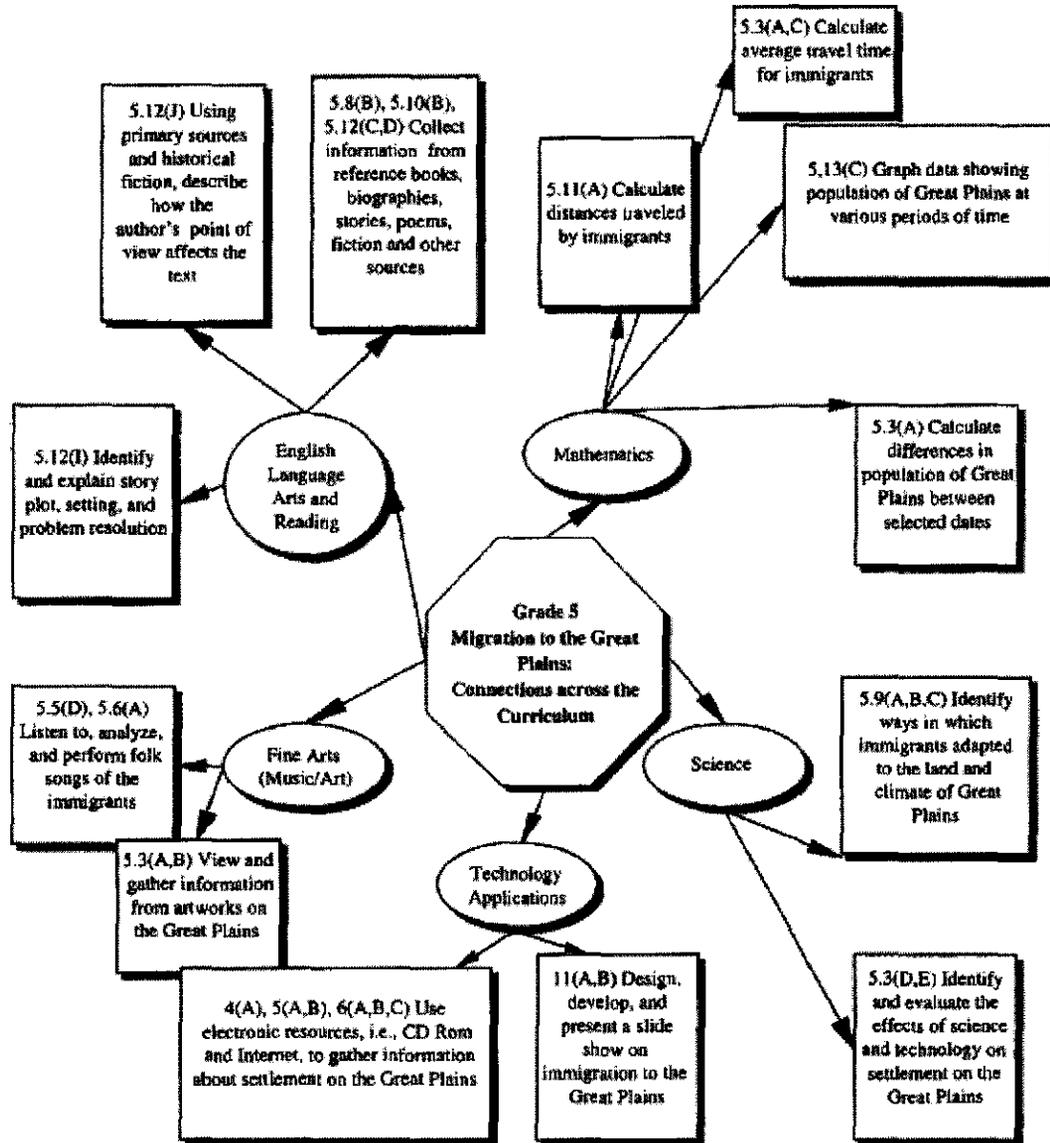
When the TEKS for Social Studies were developed, there was the expectation that local districts would develop local curriculum documents based on the TEKS. It was expected that these local documents would contain suggestions for detailed lesson plans and a rich variety of resources to support the TEKS. In a few cases, this expectation was realized. In many cases, however, teachers were presented only with the TEKS. Local curriculum and resources were not developed. It is my suggestion that the SBOE consider establishing a series of grants to enable knowledgeable teams to research, assemble, and provide state-wide training around resources that would assist teachers in teaching and students in more fully attaining the TEKS for Social Studies. These resources might include curriculum units, lesson plans, child and adolescent literature, videos, primary source materials, etc.

12. Is the subject area aligned horizontally and vertically?

Yes. The TEKS for Social Studies are an excellent model of both horizontal and vertical alignment. As one of the early sets of state social studies standards developed, the TEKS for Social Studies became a national model for horizontal and vertical alignment. In order to enhance horizontal alignment, the original writing team reviewed the work of other writing teams (language arts, science, etc.) and attempted to develop both content and skill standards and student expectations that would create the opportunity for common areas of study between and among the discipline areas. Following is a chart that

illustrates, for Grade 5, the horizontal alignment of TEKS standards and expectations for an instructional unit on westward migration in the U.S. This illustration appeared originally in the *Texas Social Studies Framework: Kindergarten – Grade 12* (1999). Austin, TX: Texas Education Agency.

**Figure 8: Migration to the Great Plains:
Connections across the Curriculum (Grade 5)**



The TEKS for Social Studies also are characterized by a strong vertical alignment of the standards and student expectations. Members of the original TEKS writing team were periodically asked to review each of the eight strands of the social studies TEKS

and to suggest modifications to strengthen the vertical alignment. The following table provides an illustration of how the concept of rules and laws is developed across three grade levels. The development of the concept of rules/laws and their functions at the early grade levels establishes the basis for more sophisticated understandings of the role and function of law at later grade levels, e.g., Grade 4 Texas, Grade 5 U.S., Grade 6 World, Grade 7 Texas, Grade 8 U.S., etc. There are many other examples of well-articulated concepts and skills across the K-12 social studies standards.

Grade	Standard	Student Expectation
K (8)(A)	The student understands the purpose of rules	Identify purposes for having rules
1 (10)(A)	The student understands the purpose of rules and laws	Explain the need for rules and laws in the home, school, and community
2 (11)(B)	The student understands the purpose of government	Describe how governments establish order, provide security, and manage conflict