

Initial Review of Current  
Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS)  
for Kindergarten–Grade 12 (K-12) Social Studies  
Regarding Revisions to the Standards

prepared for the

State Board of Education

by

Jeff Lash  
University of Houston-Clear Lake

13 December 2021

Dear Members of the Texas State Board of Education:

Let me begin by thanking you for the opportunity to serve as a Content Advisor for the Review and Revision of the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills for social studies. It is an honor to serve.

As you know, Chapter 113 of the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) lists social studies standards for what students should know and be able to do by grade-level and course. For this report, I conducted an initial review of all social studies topics and learning expectations for grades K-8 and for high school Economics, History Since 1877, World History, World Geography, U.S. Government courses.

Overall, the TEKS serve the state's students well. The eight strands, while providing a balanced and integrated approach to understanding the complex world in which we live, could be collapsed for clarity into disciplinary strands. Social studies concepts are developed logically from grade to grade and from course to course. If taught well, the TEKS provide sufficient preparation for students to succeed as they advance through the grades and into postsecondary studies.

As with any living document, there are opportunities to improve on the excellent work of the past with revisions to both existing TEKS content and format. Providing additional guidance to educators through expanded "including" and "such as" content statements, for example, would help clarify learning expectations. Likewise, rethinking how the skills strand is organized and reorganizing a small percentage of topics and learning expectations would help vertical align all skills and expectations across all grade levels and strands. Finally, updating the TEKS with learning expectations that reflect the current American social studies landscape would provide students with the knowledge and skills necessary for state, national, and global citizenship.

I look forward to working with you in the months ahead.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jeff Lash". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jeff Lash, Ph.D.  
Associate Professor of Geography  
University of Houston-Clear Lake

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*Is the current strand framework for the k-12 social studies TEKS appropriate?*

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Based on my review of the TEKS strand framework, the content strands could be consolidated into four disciplinary strands civics, economics, geography and history with one additional strand devoted to skills. Consolidating the strands would simplify the organization of social studies knowledge into logical topics with corresponding disciplinary skills.

Regarding the existing eighth strand, social studies skills, I would recommend reorganizing the social studies skills around statements that are more easily integrated with content standards. Like the current skills standards, each new standard would be applied from Pre-K to Grade 12 and across all content strands.

Consider the current TEKS social studies skills which require that the student:

- Communicates in written, oral, and visual forms.
- Uses problem-solving and decision-making skills, working independently and with others.
- Applies critical-thinking skills to organize and use information acquired through established research methodologies from a variety of valid sources, including technology.
- Uses problem-solving and decision-making skills, working independently and with others. The student is expected to use problem-solving and decision-making processes to identify a problem, gather information, list and consider options, consider advantages and disadvantages, choose and implement a solution, and evaluate the effectiveness of the solution.

Now consider the skills standards or “practices” adopted by the state of Massachusetts:<sup>1</sup>

- Demonstrate civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions.
- Develop focused questions or problem statements and conduct inquiries.
- Organize information and data from multiple primary and secondary sources.
- Analyze the purpose and point of view of each source; distinguish opinion from fact.
- Evaluate the credibility, accuracy, and relevance of each source.
- Argue or explain conclusions, using valid reasoning and evidence.
- Determine next steps and take informed action, as appropriate.

Like the current skills topics, each reworked topic could have specific learning expectations. For example, “Demonstrate civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions” could specify the following expectations:

- *Civic knowledge* includes the core knowledge in the Content Standards relating to civics and government, economics, geography, and history.
- *Civic intellectual skills* encompass knowing how to identify, assess, interpret, describe, analyze and explain matters of concern in civic life.
- *Civic participatory skills* encompass knowing how to make and support arguments, use the political process to communicate with elected officials and representatives of government, and plan strategically for civic change.

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<sup>1</sup> Full text is available at the [Massachusetts Department of Education History and Social Science Framework website](#).

- *Civic dispositions* encompass values, virtues, and behaviors, such as respect for others, commitment to equality, capacity for listening, and capacity for communicating in ways accessible to others.

For the second practice/skill “Develop focused questions or problem statements and conduct inquiries,” students would demonstrate the ability to develop focused research questions in social studies or define the dimensions of a particular problem from the perspective of each content/discipline strand. Students would learn that each field in the social sciences has its own ways of defining questions.

In addition, each social studies skills stand include grade-level appropriate English Language Arts and Reading skills. These skills could be bundled under strand topics such as comprehension, response skills, composition, and inquiry and research.<sup>2</sup>

The proposed skills strand revisions represent a move toward an explicitly inquiry-based approach to practicing social studies. The move reflects the importance of inquiry-based disciplinary understanding in social studies classrooms and would establish clear standards for disciplinary literacy in civics, economics, geography, and history.

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*Are common social studies themes adequately addressed across the K–12 TEKS?*

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Yes, common social studies themes are adequately addressed in the TEKS.

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*Does each grade level and/or course follow a complete and logical development of social studies concepts presented within the grade level/course?*

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Yes, overall, each grade level and/or course follows a complete and logical development of social studies concepts within the grade level/course.

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<sup>2</sup> For an example of integrated disciplinary and language arts skills, please see the [Tennessee Social Studies Standards](#) published in November 2020.

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### *Are the TEKS vertically aligned?*

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Vertical alignment refers to linking topics and expectations together as a holistic educational experience. The Social Studies TEKS reflect incomplete or semi-vertical alignment. For the most part topics are aligned across grades. In some cases, learning expectations are aligned across grade levels using verbs and content, albeit in an unsystematic fashion.

For example, Tables 1 and 2 below reflect the incomplete vertical alignment across four grades and across one stand and several topics. Note in Table 1 that while the verbs “identify and analyze,” “identify and describe,” “describe,” and “analyze” are semi-aligned, there is no clear vertical alignment across the learning expectations. In other cases, expectations are repeated, or backtrack at different grades.

The result of semi-vertically aligned topics and/or expectations is confusion and frustration for students and teachers alike. The burden of vertically aligning expectations falls to the teacher to figure out, perhaps with help from a school or district-level supervisor. Many teachers, especially those in rural areas, do not have access to this type of professional support. Aligning the TEKS into clearly identifiable vertical pathways would facilitate successful learning outcomes.

In an effort to create more vertical alignment within the TEKS strands, and as discussed later in this report, I recommend reorganizing the skills strand to facilitate vertical alignment from Pre-K-12 and across all of the content strands.

**Table 1.** Grade 5 History Strand Semi-Vertical Alignment

<b>History: Time, Continuity, and Change</b>			
Grade 5 US History	Grade 6 Contemporary World Cultures	Grade 7 Texas History	Grade 8 US History to 1876
5.2A <b>Identify and analyze</b> the causes and effects of events prior to and during the American Revolution, including the French and Indian War and the Boston Tea Party.	6.2A <b>Identify and describe</b> the historical influence of individuals or groups on various contemporary societies.	7.3A <b>Describe</b> the chain of events that led to the Texas Revolution, including the Fredonian Rebellion, the Mier y Terán Report, the Law of April 6, 1830, the Turtle Bayou Resolutions, and the arrest of Stephen F. Austin.	8.4A <b>Analyze</b> causes of the American Revolution, including the Proclamation of 1763, the Intolerable Acts, the Stamp Act, mercantilism, lack of representation in Parliament, and British economic policies following the French and Indian War.

**Table 2.** Grade 5 Citizenship Strand Semi-Vertical Alignment

<b>Citizenship: Civic Ideals and Practices</b>			
Grade 5 US History	Grade 6 Contemporary World Cultures	Grade 7 Texas History	Grade 8 US History to 1876
5.20A <b>Describe</b> the fundamental rights guaranteed by each amendment in the Bill of Rights, including freedom of religion, speech, and press; the right to assemble and petition the government; the right to keep and bear arms; the right to trial by jury; and the right to an attorney.	6.11A <b>Describe</b> and compare roles and responsibilities of citizens in various contemporary societies, including the United States.	7.15A <b>Explain</b> rights of Texas citizens.	8.19B <b>Summarize</b> rights guaranteed in the Bill of Rights.

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*Do the high school courses sufficiently prepare students for postsecondary success?*

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Yes, if taught well, the current high school social studies courses sufficiently prepare students for postsecondary success.

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*Do the elementary and middle school TEKS adequately prepare students for social studies content at the high school level?*

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While there are dozens of relevant, concise standards for elementary and middle school students, there is room for improvement. At the elementary level, increasing the number and quality of content-specific standards would help establish disciplinary foundations for learning social studies. At the middle school level, more vertical alignment would ensure that students are prepared for high school.

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*Are there topics that should be eliminated or revised because they are not essential or no longer reflect current research or practices within the field?*

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Of the 319 topics reviewed, I would consider revising or eliminating 52 (17%) (see Table 3). Most critically, I would revise the skills strand topic as discussed previously in the “Stand Framework” section of this report. Table 4 lists topics recommended for revision.

In several cases, topics, as discussed in the previous section of this report, do not have any associated (lettered) learning outcomes. Instead, the topic contains one or more embedded learning expectation. A revision that split the expectation out from the topic statement would add clarity.

For example, the topic 3.12.Culture states “The student understands the importance of writers and artists to the cultural heritage of communities. The student is expected to identify how various writers and artists such as Kadir Nelson, Tomie dePaola, Carmen Lomas Garza, and Laura Ingalls Wilder and their stories, poems, statues, and paintings contribute to the cultural heritage of communities.” Splitting the expectation out from the topic into an “A” learning expectation would provide clarity.

**Table 3.** Number of Topics Recommended for Revision by Grade/Course

Grade/Topic	Number of Strand Topics	Number of Strand Topics in Need of Revision	Percentage of Strand Topics in Need of Revision
Kindergarten	15	4	27
Grade 1	18	3	17
Grade 2	17	3	18
Grade 3	16	4	25
Grade 4	22	4	18
Grade 5	26	5	19
Grade 6	22	4	18
Grade 7	23	4	17
Grade 8	31	3	10
Economics	23	3	13
History Since 1877	31	5	16
World History	31	4	13
World Geography	23	3	13
US Government	21	3	14
<i>Total Topics Evaluated</i>	<i>319</i>	<i>52</i>	<i>17</i>



**Table 4.** List of Topics Recommended for Revision

Grade/Course	Topics Recommended for Revision
Kindergarten	10, 13, 14, 15
Grade 1	16, 17, 18
Grade 2	15, 16, 17
Grade 3	12, 14, 15, 16
Grade 4	19, 20, 21, 22
Grade 5	19, 23, 24, 25, 26
Grade 6	19, 20, 21, 22
Grade 7	20, 21, 22, 23
Grade 8	29, 30, 31
Economics	21, 22, 23
History Since 1877	12, 28, 29, 30, 31
World History	28, 29, 30, 31
World Geography	21, 22, 23
U.S. Government	19, 20, 21

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*Are the student expectations clear and specific?*

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Of the 958 learning expectations reviewed, 225 (23%) require revision to improve clarity or elimination all together (see Table 2 below). The majority of suggested revisions involve updating or adding either “such as” or “including” statements to the learning expectation. Splitting learning outcomes from topics would also improve clarity. In many cases, eliminating a standard would not impact the quality of the course.

For example, the learning expectation K.4A requires students to “identify the physical characteristics of place such as landforms, bodies of water, Earth’s resources, and weather.” A revision could add specificity by stating which landforms, bodies of water, Earth resources, and weather types. 1.14B “explain the way folktales and legends reflect beliefs, language, and traditions of communities” is clear but lacks specificity. Which folktales? Where? Please see Appendix B for a complete list of topics that I would recommend for review.

**Table 5.** Number of Learning Expectations Recommended for Revision by Grade/Course

Grade/Course	Number of Learning Expectations	Number of Learning Expectations in Need of Revision	Percentage of Learning Expectations in Need of Revision
K	33	8	24
Grade 1	42	10	24
Grade 2	43	9	21
Grade 3	42	9	21
Grade 4	67	11	16
Grade 5	71	16	23
Grade 6	64	11	17
Grade 7	71	16	23
Grade 8	94	19	20
Economics	69	17	25
History Since 1877	108	18	17
World History	117	39	33
World Geography	67	24	36
U.S. Government	70	18	26
<i>Total LE Evaluated</i>	<i>958</i>	<i>225</i>	<i>23</i>

**Table 6.** Learning Expectations Recommended for Revision by Grade/Course

Grade/Course	Learning Expectation Recommended for Revision
Kindergarten	3C, 4A, 4C, 7B, 11A, 12A, 12B, 15
Grade 1	2A, 5A, 6B, 8A, 12A, 12B, 13A, 14B, 17E, 18
Grade 2	5C, 9D, 10A, 11C, 11D, 15B, 16B, 16D, 17
Grade 3	1B, 1C, 3A, 6C, 8B, 12, 13B, 15A, 16
Grade 4	3E, 4A, 7B, 8C, 14A, 16A, 16B, 17B, 21A, 22
Grade 5	2B, 2C, 4D, 5C, 6B, 8B, 10C, 17C, 18B, 19, 20B, 21A, 21B, 23D, 25A, 26
Grade 6	1A, 1B, 2A, 3C, 3D, 7B, 15D, 16A, 20A, 21A, 22
Grade 7	1A, 2D, 3C, 4B, 8B, 8C, 10A, 10B, 12C, 15A, 15B, 17A, 17B, 18B, 22A, 23
Grade 8	1A, 4B, 6A, 8B, 9C, 10A, 10B, 10C, 11A, 16B, 18A, 19A, 20A, 22A, 23C, 29A, 29E, 30A, 31
Economics	2A, 4C, 5A, 6A, 7B, 8A, 9B, 11A, 13A, 14A, 15B, 16D, 17A, 17D, 20E, 22A, 23
History Since 1877	1A, 2A, 2B, 4C, 8C, 9A, 10A, 10B, 12, 13B, 14A, 17C, 22B, 24A, 24C, 28C, 29B, 31
World History	2A, 3A, 4C, 4D, 4H, 4J, 5A, 6B, 7C, 8B, 9B, 10D, 11A, 13B, 13D, 13F, 15A, 15B, 16A, 16C, 17C, 19D, 20A, 20B, 20C, 21A, 21F, 22A, 22C, 24A, 24B, 25A, 25B, 27C, 27D, 28A, 28B, 30A, 31
World Geography	1A, 1B, 2A, 3A, 3B, 3C, 7D, 11C, 12A, 12B, 13B, 14A, 14C, 15B, 16A, 17D, 18A, 18B, 20A, 21A, 21B, 21C, 23B, 23C
U.S. Government	1A, 1C, 1E, 1F, 2A, 2B, 3A, 3B, 3C, 4C, 13A, 13C, 14C, 15A, 16A, 18B, 20E, 21

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*Do you have any recommendations or feedback based on the Fordham report?*

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In June 2021, the [Thomas B. Fordham Foundation](#) published a review of state standards for civics and history. *The State of State Standards for Civics and U.S. History in 2021* evaluates the K–12 civics and U.S. History standards adopted by the fifty states and the District of Columbia based on the quality, completeness, and rigor of their content and the clarity of its presentation. Reviews were conducted by a bipartisan team of veteran educators and subject-matter experts with deep knowledge of civics and U.S. History<sup>3</sup>.

Reviewers rated five jurisdictions (Alabama, California, Massachusetts, Tennessee, and the District of Columbia) as “exemplary” in both civics and U.S. History standards. Another ten states were rated “good” in both subjects. Fifteen states were rated “mediocre” in at least one subject. Twenty states were rated “inadequate” in both subjects. Texas rated “good” in civics and “mediocre” in U.S. History.

To ensure that every American student has access to a rich and balanced civics and U.S. History education, the report encourages states to

- Maximize attention to civics and U.S. History in elementary and middle school and require at least one year of U.S. History and one semester of Civics in high school;
- Provide comprehensive and detailed guidance in both subjects;
- Take a user-friendly approach to the organization and presentation of their standards; and
- Put more emphasis on writing, argumentation, problem analysis, and the connections between core content and current events.

The report lists four strengths of the Texas civics standards<sup>4</sup>

1. The standards include a great deal of rigorous content.
2. The language in the standards is clear and precise.
3. State government is unusually well handled.
4. Primary sources are often specifically required.

The report also lists three strengths of the Texas U.S. History Standards

1. Texas requires two full U.S. History surveys: an introductory overview in grade 5 and a two-part survey across grade 8 and high school.
2. Much essential U.S. History content appears somewhere in the standards.
3. There is a reasonably strong emphasis on history-related skills, including written presentation.

In addition to strengths, the report lists weaknesses of both sets of standards. Regarding the Texas civics standards

1. The standards aren’t as user-friendly as they should be.
2. Coverage of the electoral process and comparative politics is weak.

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<sup>3</sup> Please see [The State of State Standards for Civics and U.S. History in 2021](#).

<sup>4</sup> Please see the [Texas Profile](#) in the Fordham Report for complete details.

The report lists the weakness in the Texas U.S. History standards

1. Related content is splintered between seven different strands, seriously undermining coherence and chronology.
2. There are vestiges of ideological slant, particularly when it comes to slavery and its role in the sectional crisis leading to the Civil War.
3. U.S. History content outlining is uneven, often relying on bare references to events and arbitrary lists of names with little context or explanation.

In response to the Fordham Foundation's reported, I concur with the stated strengths and offer feedback on each of the stated weaknesses.

Regarding the civics standards, I agree that they are not as user friendly as they could be. The TEKS require a great deal of "unpacking" or "decoding," and external clarification to understand how all of the pieces fit together. I also agree that coverage of the electoral process and comparative policies is weak.

Assessing the weaknesses of the history standards is less straight forward. While I agree that some learning expectations have an ideological slant and that some content provides little context for teachers to work with, on the whole the history standards require minimal revision. To state, however, that the strand organization of the TEKS undermines coherence and chronology is simply wrong. The strand-based organization reflects a philosophy that privileges a multi-disciplinary approach to investigating a complex and messy world over a singular, chronological approach that masks complexity.

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*What other suggestions do you have for ways in which the social studies TEKS can be improved?*

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I conclude with two suggestions for improving the TEKS.

First, I suggest updating the TEKS with learning expectations that reflect the current social studies landscape in order to provide students with the knowledge and skills necessary not only for American citizenship but also for global citizenship.

Consider these facts: the word “poverty” and the phrase “climate change” do not appear in the World Geography course TEKS; the phrase “United Nations” does not appear in the World History course TEKS; the word “gerrymandering” does not appear in the U.S. Government course TEKS, and the word “redlining” does not appear in the U.S. History Since 1877 course TEKS. Of course, it would be easy to omit controversial words or phrases or topics from the TEKS, but doing so would lessen students’ ability to be an informed citizen. While it is not possible, nor advisable, to include every “pet” vocabulary word or phrase as part of a learning expectation, the TEKS need to reflect current local, state, national, and international conversations.

Inclusion of certain words or phrases in the TEKS might create controversy. While political controversy is a natural part of the democratic process, educators are often unprepared to guide classroom discussions on “hot button” social studies issues or events at local, national or international scales. In addition, the objective presentation of contentious topics requires educators to be mindful of their own bias and requires educators to master the art of ensuring classrooms are safe spaces for students to explore difficult topics.

My second suggestion is an extension of the first. Specifically, I suggest building into the TEKS support for educators who might struggle to teach controversial or unfamiliar topics. Support could take the form of Texas Education Agency authored teacher guides.

For example, on December 2, 2021, Texas Senate Bill 3 will come into effect. The bill relates “to civics training programs for certain public school social studies teachers and principals, parental access to certain learning management systems, and certain curriculum in public schools, including certain instructional requirements and prohibitions.”<sup>5</sup> Those affected by this law would be well-served if the TEKS included ancillary materials that helped educators better understand the components of quality civic education. The Council on State Government’s [State Civic Education Toolkit](#) could serve as a model.

Additional resources such as disciplinary guides with titles like “Questions Economists Ask” or “Thinking Like a Geographer,” or “Understanding the World through Social Studies Inquiry” would provide much needed professional development in support of teaching the TEKS.

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<sup>5</sup> The [complete text of SB3](#) is downloadable at the Texas Legislature Online.