

Dr. Alexa M. Proffitt

Guiding Questions

1. The current TEKS are organized in eight strands: history; geography; economics; government; citizenship; culture; science, technology, and society; and social studies skills. Is the current strand framework for the K-12 social studies TEKS appropriate? If not, what recommendations do you have for organizing or structuring the TEKS?

The incorporation of civics as a strand for social studies would streamline the government and citizenships strands and allow for better alignment to national social studies standards. There is the opportunity for the citizenship strand to be replaced by civics to put a stronger focus on active participation within society or civics and government strands being combined,

IN A CONSTITUTIONAL DEMOCRACY, productive civic engagement requires knowledge of the history, principles, and foundations of our American democracy, and the ability to participate in civic and democratic processes. People demonstrate civic engagement when they address public problems individually and collaboratively and when they maintain, strengthen, and improve communities and societies. Thus, civics is, in part, the study of how people participate in governing society ([C3 Framework](#)).

Civics education is especially important given the current state of our society and would provide the opportunity to frame the social studies standards in a lens that actively engages students in making connections between the content they are learning in their classrooms and the application of that content in their lives and communities.

2. Are common social studies themes (e.g., geography, civics, history, etc.) adequately addressed across the K–12 TEKS? If not, what recommendations do you have for revising?

- Colonization is embedded in almost every grade level's content, however the naming of the specific type of colonization that is part of the U.S., settler colonization, is never mentioned. Students need to have a nuanced understanding of what colonization is in order to truly be able to analyze its impacts, specifically within the United States. As mentioned above, a nuanced interrogation of civics education as part of the strands would provide the opportunity for students to engage in understanding historical foundations and current lived realities of democracy in practice.
- There is a significant lack of global historical and geographic knowledge within the K-8 grades. Students in Texas need to understand Texas within the context of the entire country and the world as a whole.
- The 6th grade content embedded within the history strand stands apart in its lack of depth. When analyzing that strand in relation to the other middle grades courses, and then

Dr. Alexa M. Proffitt

the world history course at the high school level, we are not preparing students for success in relation to historical content.

3. Does each grade level and/or course follow a complete and logical development of social studies concepts presented within the grade level/course? If not, what improvements are needed?

- The 6th grade course focuses on globally societies, however little guidance or depth is embedded in the history strand for this course. 6th grade provides the foundation for the rigorous historical analysis that must happen in order for students to be prepared in the subsequent grades. What inevitably ends up happening is that having less historical rigor embedded in the 6th grade course, impacts the ability for students to be successful in the higher grades. The history standards of 6.1 and 6.2 need to include specific content that needs to be covered within that grade, better mirroring the history strands in both 7th & 8th grade. This is not to say that the people, places, and events that could be listed in those standards are exhaustive, but provide structure for the history content in that grade. The high school world history course provides a good scaffold for what the 6th grade course could embody. There is nuance in those high school standards that our 6th grade students need in order to be successful when getting to the high school content.
- 7th grade offers an opportunity for supporting the content in 8th grade. There is the possibility of 7th grade Texas history being condensed into a singular semester, and then the 2nd half of 7th grade focusing on content embedded within the 8th grade content of the early colonial period through Reconstruction. There are numerous overlaps in the 7th grade standards that focus on Texas, but within the greater historical events from 8th grade. Knowing that 8th grade is the first time that social studies is tested, and that the rigor of analysis is quite high, we need to support students in meeting the rigor of social studies skills and providing adequate time for covering the content. As the pacing currently allows, students are able to cover the content of pre-colonization to Reconstruction only at the most basic level, not allowing for the depth of content that would support students being successful in high school. Below is a screenshot of the 2021 STAAR results that demonstrate only 13% of the state achieved “mastery level” for 8th grade social studies. This low level of mastery further supports the need of our students to have sufficient time to analyze historical content with depth of understanding that the current standards schedule, aligned with grades, does not provide.

8th Grade Social Studies	56%	27%	13%
---------------------------------	-----	-----	-----

Dr. Alexa M. Proffitt

4. Are the TEKS vertically aligned so that concepts are introduced, elaborated on, and refined across multiple grade levels and students will possess the necessary knowledge and skills to be successful in later grades? If not, what improvements are needed?

- Texas history is discussed in grades 4 & 7. The standards state that more depth and breadth is embedded within the 7th grade course, however much of the same content is discussed. There is the possibility of 4th grade covering less content, essentially splitting the 4th and 7th grade as we split the US history content between 8th and 11th. In the elementary grades we are covering so much content, but with so little depth that we are essentially green lighting teachers to teach social studies content as a memorization/fill in the blank type of pedagogy instead of emphasizing the need for embedding social studies skills and historical analysis that support our students in the upper grades.
- 7.5 History. The student understands how events and issues shaped the history of Texas during the Civil War and Reconstruction./ 4.4A describe the impact of the Civil War and Reconstruction on Texas; → This standard exemplifies how similar topics are discussed across grade levels, but the opportunity to delve deep into the Civil War and Reconstruction is not fully developed until 8th grade (8.8 & 8.9) therefore we are setting students up to not actually have the contextual knowledge with which to truly meet the rigor of these standards in relation to the Civil War & Reconstruction
- We have to determine the goal of social studies in relation to Texas history, do we want students to be able to identify the connections between Texas within the context of these huge historical events (Civil War & Reconstruction), or do we want students to be able to critically examine the large historical event in depth and then be able to explicate Texas' role within the larger context of that major event (the Civil War & Reconstruction)? The way the standards are currently written emphasizes the depth of understanding within Texas at the expense of the nuances within the larger historical event.

5.

A. Do the high school courses sufficiently prepare students for postsecondary success? If not, what recommendations do you have for revising?

- The content embedded in the high school courses is vast and nuanced. In order to prepare our students for postsecondary success, there needs to be a focus on students reading, writing, thinking, and speaking about social studies content every single day. Current social studies skills, such as WH.30, is one of the last skills embedded within the standards that directly addresses skills of application of social studies content. In order for students to be successful in their postsecondary choices, the emphasis on the demonstration of social studies skills through written and oral form need to be prioritized in the sequence of social studies skills. Our separation of social studies and literacy skills

Dr. Alexa M. Proffitt

is what disconnects the internalization and application of social studies skills, something that all students need to be successful in the future.

B. Do the elementary and middle school TEKS adequately prepare students for social studies content at the high school level? If not, what recommendations do you have for revising?

- The elementary standards do not provide adequate support for progressing students' social studies content knowledge in the middle grades. The standards in particularly 4th and 5th grade are so vast, covering a huge expanse of time, that it does not allow for the deep application of social studies skills within the grade level. We see this manifesting in the 6th grade standards, that by far, are the least nuanced throughout the K-12 spectrum. When investigating the rigor of the standards, truly rigorous historical content is not embedded until 7th and 8th grades. This does not allow for the internalization and application of social studies content and skills throughout the educational experiences of our students. As discussed elsewhere in this document, it makes sense for there to be nuance in the standards that allows for depth and breadth of content across the grades, but most especially in 4-8, in preparation for high school. This might mean splitting the content that is covered in 4th/7th and 5th/8th to allow for less time periods to be covered, but with depth of content. I think it could be highly beneficial to split 7th grade into semesters, the first being Texas history and the second being colonization to the early republic in order to allow for depth of content knowledge and true application of social studies skills. This shift could then allow for better alignment between social studies and ELAR skills to be embedded in order to demonstrate the power of literacy skills being embedded in social studies.

6. 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? If so, please identify by grade level or course and student expectation number.

- I did not determine any content that needed to be eliminated during this initial review, however the amount of time spent on Texas history should not be so disproportionate to the time spent on understanding the history of the rest of the world.

7. Are the student expectations clear and specific? If not, please give examples of how the language might be improved.

I have listed some student expectations below where the verbiage could be more clear.

Dr. Alexa M. Proffitt

3.2B compare ways in which people in the local community and other communities meet their needs for government, education, communication, transportation, and recreation.

3.11 Culture. The student understands the role of heroes in shaping the culture of communities, the state, and the nation. The student is expected to:

(A) identify and describe the heroic deeds of state and national heroes and military and first responders such as Hector P. Garcia, James A. Lovell, and the Four Chaplains; and

(B) identify and describe the heroic deeds of individuals such as Harriet Tubman, Todd Beamer, and other contemporary heroes.

- The verbiage of the highlighted portion of 3.11A makes it difficult to understand “identify and describe the heroic deeds of state, national, military, and first responders...”

4.1B identify and compare the ways of life of American Indian groups in Texas before European exploration (should be replaced with colonization) such as the Lipan Apache, Karankawa, Caddo, and Jumano;

4.1D locate American Indian groups remaining in Texas such as the Ysleta Del Sur Pueblo, Alabama-Coushatta, and Kickapoo.

- identify the American Indian lands upon which you are currently located (focus on embedded place-based education throughout standards)

4.2A summarize motivations for European exploration and settlement (should be replaced with colonization) of Texas, including economic opportunity, competition, and the desire for expansion;

4.2 B & E: identify the accomplishments... (should instead be *identify and explain the impact of the actions taken by...*)

4.17A identify customs, celebrations, and traditions of various cultural, regional, and local groups in Texas such as Cinco de Mayo, Oktoberfest, and Fiesta San Antonio; and

- Are we solely identifying or also analyzing? Are we having students understand the origins and misconceptions of some of these ‘celebrations’?

5.21 Culture. The student understands the contributions of people of various racial, ethnic, and religious groups to the United States culture. The student is expected to:

(A) describe customs and traditions of various racial, ethnic, and religious groups in the United States; and

(B) summarize the contributions of people of various racial, ethnic, and religious groups to our national identity.

- This entire standard is vague and needs specific content embedded to guide instruction

6.10C identify historical origins of democratic forms of government such as Ancient Greece (negates the influence of Indigenous peoples/practices on the understanding of democracy)

Dr. Alexa M. Proffitt

7.2C identify important individuals, events, and issues related to European colonization of Texas, including the establishment of Catholic missions, towns, and ranches, and the contributions of individuals such as Fray Damián Massanet, Antonio Margil de Jesús, and Francisco Hidalgo;

- This student expectation only engages students with “identifying” the very important topic of the colonization of Texas. There needs to be a higher level of rigor for examining the impact of European colonization of Texas, especially as depending on location in Texas, those impacts are drastically different.

7.9 Geography. The student understands the effects of the interaction between humans and the environment in Texas (and other grades within the same geography strand)

- Some iteration of this standard is embedded in most grades. There should be an added student expectation of “compare the ways in which peoples indigenous to the land and settlers adapted to and modified the environment”

8.2 History. The student understands the causes of exploration and colonization eras.

- Nowhere in the student expectations for this standard is any conversation about the impact of colonization on Indigenous peoples

WH.2B explain the significance of the following years as turning points: 1898 (Spanish-American War), 1914-1918 (World War I), 1929 (the Great Depression begins), 1939- 1945 (World War II), 1957 (Sputnik launch ignites U.S.-Soviet space race), 1968 (Martin Luther King Jr. assassination), 1969 (U.S. lands on the moon), 1991 (Cold War ends), 2001 (terrorist attacks on World Trade Center and the Pentagon), and 2008 (election of first black president, Barack Obama).

- The ‘B’ in Black president should have be capitalized

8. Do you have any recommendations or feedback based on the Fordham report? If so, please explain.

- The Fordham report supports the suggestion for civics to serve as one of the social studies strands.
- The grade of a C+ in relation to U.S. History demonstrates the significant need to support that content in grades 5, 8, and 11. Again, with the possible redistribution of content across 7th grade.

Weakness 3. States with weak civics or U.S. History standards make poor use of early grades or fail to revisit essential content in later grades. (p. 27)

- This is clearly necessary to address in the reevaluation of the standards. We know that the elementary grades cover content at too low of a rigor, therefore we need to reimagine social studies instruction in the elementary grades to better prepare students in middle and high school.

Dr. Alexa M. Proffitt

Weakness 5. States with weak civics and U.S. History standards pay little attention to writing, argumentation, problem analysis, and the connections between core content and current issues and events. (pg. 29)

- This finding directly connects to my later comments of the social studies skills needing to better embed critical ELAR skills to fully realize rigorous social studies content in application.

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

- I am not sure why every grade's introduction includes (4) Students identify the role of the U.S. free enterprise system within the parameters of this course and understand that this system may also be referenced as capitalism or the free market system.
- Indigenous peoples are not mentioned at all until 4th grade and then sparsely in the remaining grades. This erasure is consistent with a settler colonial model for education and must be rectified in the new standards.
- All science, technology, and society standards that mention notable scientists never/rarely include women across the grade span
- The MAS & AAS standards are foundational content that should be incorporated into the current K-12 TEKS. There are several spaces in the standards that do not fully include the experiences of diverse groups of peoples throughout history. We can clearly see the ways in which the MAS standards complement 4 & 7th grade content, a prime place to begin the incorporation of that content within these standards. The AAS standards have a significant amount of overlap in the 8th and 11th grade contents that would allow for full understanding of these historical time periods, especially since MAS & AAS courses are most often only present in high school.
- The embedded social studies skills strand needs to incorporate more ELAR skills in order for the content to meet the demand of social studies skills. We are not creating a space where interdisciplinary skills can thrive for students. So much of the textual analysis demands of primary and secondary sources requires the nuanced understanding of literacy that is so often not manifesting in social studies classrooms.
- The sequence of the courses and the ways in which the content is broken up needs to be revised. The sequence as listed below demonstrates the way in which a lot of time of each grade is spent going over content that was covered in other grades due to the amount of time spent between similar contents. For example, after the first portion of U.S. History in 8th grade (perhaps even the second semester of

Dr. Alexa M. Proffitt

7th), we do not get the second half until 11th grade. While there is content embedded in World History and Geography that aligns to U.S. History, it would make much more sense for that content to follow 8th grade. Then the two World History courses would provide global context for some of the content covered in U.S. History, allowing for high school content to be completed with Economics and Government's semester long courses.

- The early elementary grades need to incorporate more content in order to support the work in the subsequent grades. We are not allowing young students to demonstrate their knowledge with these concepts at an early age, when cognitively they are ready to tackle this content.
- A place-based approach to understanding history could be solidified in the early grades. Do you know the ancestral land you reside on? Do you know the specific history of that land? How does your knowledge of your place impact the ability to understand spaces outside of that location?
- The strands being streamlined to support national social studies standards to Civics, Economics, Geography, & History make the most sense
- Those strands being grouped within thematic topics, such as the "Mexican Revolution" with the 4 strands of content being underneath that topic makes much more sense than teachers having to pull together standards from multiple different strands to align to a single theme/topic