

Idaho Content Standards for Social Studies for 2023–24

The American Historical Association has reviewed the draft Idaho Content Standards for Social Studies and appreciates their effectiveness as the basis for secondary history education. Additional attention to state and local history would enhance this framework by engaging students through exploration of the pasts that shape their experiences and the communities in which they live. We also strongly recommend clearer guidance to districts and teachers regarding westward migration, civil rights, immigration, and other topics in both US and world history.

The AHA is the largest professional organization for historians in the United States. Operating under a congressional charter “for the promotion of historical studies,” our association has long offered guidance on local, state, and federal education policy. In conjunction with the National Council for the Social Studies, the AHA helped develop and publish the C3 Framework in 2013. Our official [criteria for state standards](#) (1997, rev. 2019) espouse robust support for the kind of democratic and inclusive process of revision now underway in Idaho for the 2023–24 cycle. Over the past two years historians at the AHA have reviewed and appraised standards frameworks in all 50 states as part of a larger research project on the US history curriculum nationwide.

Like the best documents adopted in other states, the draft Idaho Content Standards for Social Studies balance historical content and critical thinking skills. The overarching approach in this draft is a good one, sketching out the architecture of course content in broad strokes without encumbering educators with an unmanageable volume of detail. We also admire the explicit engagement with history since the 1970s, overlooked in many other state standards.

Nevertheless, our review identified several gaps and oversights in the level of detail devoted to specific content areas.

The AHA offers the following suggestions:

- **State and local history.** Social studies standards in many states foreground people, events, and themes related to their own local and regional context. Anchoring national and global developments around local stories can engage students in the relevance of history and historical analysis to their own lives and communities. These standards include little or no attention to Idaho and its specific history after elementary school. This is a missed opportunity. The Indigenous history of Idaho offers an obvious starting point. The draft standards are, on the whole, fairly strong in their coverage of Indigenous histories on a national scale. Hence we were surprised to find that language about “Indian citizenship, Indian Reorganization Act, Termination, AIM, and self-determination” have been dropped from the original 2016 standards. We recommend that some or all of this material be restored. We were similarly disappointed that while the five federally recognized tribal nations in the state—the Coeur d’Alene Tribe, Kootenai Tribe of Idaho, Shoshone Bannock Tribes, Nez Perce Tribe, and

Shoshone-Paiute Tribes—are mentioned in Grade 2, the standards do not sustain engagement with these histories across the educational lives of students. The section on Federal Indian Policy in US History II (9-12.US2.1), for example, could address the Nez Perce War; the standard on civil rights movements (9-12.US2.27) might effectively call attention to the American Indian Movement and its influence in Idaho and neighboring states. We encourage the review committee to engage with some of the many knowledgeable historians in the state as they consider ways in which to weave state and local history throughout the social studies curriculum.

- **Westward Migration.** Standards documents sometimes frame the territorial expansion of the United States during the 19th century in ways that overlooks the complex mix of motivations that shaped the experiences of people across the West. Given the central importance of this period to Idaho’s own history, we suggest that you create space to explore the choices and decisions of people in this period, as well as the implications of those choices. The US did not just expand into a void. Some Americans opted to migrate into Western lands. Others did not. Indigenous actors did not simply experience this process. Their decisions shaped outcomes, as did those of many others across the country and around the world.
- **Civil Rights Movements.** The single standard on civil rights movements (9-12.US2.27) compresses a considerable amount of content that is of vital importance to the history of the United States into a single line of an otherwise robust standards framework. Furthermore, there is a significant gap in coverage between this standard in the section devoted to the Cold War (1945–74) and the only other reference to civil rights (9-12.US2.43), which is mentioned after the 9/11 attacks and attends to “recent” history. We encourage you to consider adding more details here to guide districts and teachers as they develop lessons and curricula. In recent decades, for instance, scholarship on the Civil Rights Movements of the 1960s has broadened its focus to consider the contributions and perspectives of a much broader range of actors than is sometimes reflected in oversimplified accounts. We encourage the review committee to include specific flashpoints (e.g. Birmingham in 1963, the March on Washington, or the Little Rock Nine), key Supreme Court Cases (e.g. *Brown v. Board*), transformative legislation (the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act), both lesser-known and significant figures (e.g. Fannie Lou Hamer, Claudette Colvin, Malcolm X, Thurgood Marshall), Black Power, Massive Resistance, and/or other elements of this transformational period. This is also another place to highlight state history (e.g. the integration of colleges and universities in Idaho).
- **Immigration and labor.** Several crucial topics cut across the bridge between US history I and II, and merit both fuller and more sustained coverage. The clearest examples are immigration and labor. Immigration is mentioned in the context of post-Civil War urbanization (6-12.US1.50) and in Progressivism (9-12.US2.2), but this overlooks key events and issues such as the Chinese Exclusion Act, the immigration acts of 1921, 1924, and 1965, and more recent debates about immigration policy. Similarly, late nineteenth-century labor movements are addressed in US history I (6-12.US1.49) but the standards subsequently only address the concerns of progressive-era reformers with the exploitation of labor (9-12.US2.2) and the effects of outsourcing and automation after 1992 (9-12.US2.39). Both labor and immigration merit more sustained attention across US history and should be included in lists of key issues from the 1920s through the present.

- **Global connections.** In both US and world history, the coverage of global transformations is sometimes uneven, especially in its attention to topics and issues outside of the United States and Europe. This is especially true of African and South American examples. We suggest, for instance, that the review committee include decolonization and the Non-Aligned Movement during the Cold War. The structure of the world history standards (6-9.WH.1.1-11) is understandably broad, but much of the specificity in focus involves developments in Europe (e.g. “Greco-Roman”). Districts and teachers may appreciate more guidance about key ideas, examples, and transformations that can help illustrate the standards laudable emphasis on “multiple perspectives” and “global interdependence.”

The proposed draft standards offer a solid framework for history and social studies education that is neither too vague nor overly detailed. Taking advantage of this opportunity to revise the standards by bringing in more of Idaho’s unique story, especially in relation to Native history, westward migration, mining, and public land use, as well as specifying more than a single line about the Civil Rights Movement would further strengthen them.

With these revisions, the new draft framework promises to join the highest ranks of state standards in history and social studies.

The American Historical Association’s commitment to high-quality history education in public schools across the country includes a readiness to be a resource for state education agencies in the revision of standards. Professional historians on our staff and in our governing Council can provide any additional comments or feedback that the Department of Education might find useful. We also can recommend historians in the state who might be willing to advise and consult with the standards review committee.