



For Immediate Release:

November 5, 2014

Contact: Kelly Donnelly 860.713.6525

State unveils new approach to teaching social studies

New frameworks encourage students to get involved, take action

(HARTFORD, CT)—After 18 months of development, the State Department of Education today presented the State Board of Education with Connecticut’s new frameworks for teaching social studies in kindergarten through Grade 12.

The *Connecticut Elementary and Secondary Social Studies Frameworks* is based on the national College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards, and was written by a team of Connecticut social studies educators consisting of elementary school, middle school, high school, and higher education faculty from Connecticut’s rural, suburban, and urban districts.

These frameworks represent a substantial shift in the way that social studies was most commonly taught in the past, and present a new way of teaching social studies in the Information Age. The frameworks advocate that students “take informed action,” that they become active and engaged citizens, and directly link to the Connecticut (CT) Core Standards. The frameworks also advocate for social studies at the elementary school level, something many districts have put less emphasis on in recent years.

“A strong social studies education provides students with the knowledge and skills that are necessary for their success in college, career, and society,” said Education Commissioner Stefan Pryor. “By providing guidance to school districts, these new social studies frameworks will help students become active and engaged citizens. This is part of our effort to ensure that students receive a well-rounded education in our state—not only in literacy, numeracy, and science, but also in civics, arts and fitness.”

An inquiry-based approach to social studies education is at the center of the frameworks’ new approach.

Inquiry instruction is based on both teachers and students asking and answering compelling questions. In the past, social studies classes often began and ended with “what students should know.” Over time, the skills expectation of “what students should be able to do” was added.

Through the lenses of civics, U.S. and world history, economics, and geography, the Connecticut frameworks ask students “to do” not only by communicating conclusions in essays and presentations for the classroom or the teacher, but also to take informed action within the school, local, state, and national community. Many social studies educators find this to be the most exciting and empowering instructional aspect for their students. Examples of taking informed action include:

- Students investigating fair trade policies attend a meeting of local businesses to advocate their position on fair trade goods.

- Students investigate zoning and other ordinances, construct a proposal for a new skateboard park in their community, and present this proposal to the town council for action.
- Students investigate the history of Columbus’s exploration and write editorials to their local newspaper or attend a Board of Education meeting to discuss whether the town and school should celebrate Columbus Day.
- Students studying a modern American war make a proposal to honor veterans by interviewing local veterans and establishing a local archive of these interviews.

The frameworks also recognize the important role that teachers play in helping students develop into informed, thoughtful, and active citizens and encourage teachers to provide, and help students develop, tangible opportunities to take informed action.

Another important feature of the new frameworks are the interdisciplinary connections interwoven throughout each grade. Social studies as a discipline naturally allows students to master key reading, writing, analysis, speaking and listening skills that are outlined in the Common Core literacy standards. Because of this natural connection, the social studies frameworks have noted which CT Core Standards are integrated into each section at each grade level.

The *Connecticut Elementary and Secondary Social Studies Frameworks* is not intended to be a state social studies curriculum, but rather a model districts can use. In a “local control” state such as Connecticut, each district can use the document as it sees fit. Curriculum development occurs at the district level, and the new social studies frameworks are designed to assist curriculum writers as they write or revise the social studies curriculum for their districts. There is much that is new and exciting in these frameworks, however, and the SDE strongly recommends that this document be used as a model of curriculum change in any district.

In the future, the Department will release companion guidance documents that will go into more depth on what the specifics might be in a social studies curriculum.

A draft of the new frameworks is available on the [SDE website](#).

###

CONTACT: Kelly Donnelly
Director of Communications and Community Partnerships
Connecticut State Department of Education
Phone: 860-713-6525
Mobile: 860-983-1550
Email: Kelly.Donnelly@ct.gov