

## INTRODUCTION

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### BACKGROUND

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During the 2019 legislative session, the Rhode Island legislature authorized a new round of standards review ([RIGL 16-22-30](#)). Based on this legislative directive, the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) initiated a series of steps in the fall of 2019 that began with the formation of the Rhode Island History and Social Studies Advisory Committee (RIHSSAC). The RIHSSAC is a group of Rhode Island educators from the K-12 and postsecondary systems. It includes representation from various community, civic, and historical organizations and continues to meet.

In 2019, the first task of the RIHSSAC was to review the existing RI Social Studies Grade-Span Expectations (GSEs) against the criteria set by the legislature and to recommend to RIDE whether the GSEs be kept, revised, or replaced. To fulfill this task, starting in late summer of 2020, the RIHSSAC developed an interactive process to engage diverse communities throughout Rhode Island to provide input on the skills, content, and equity focus for the new standards, and to offer feedback on other content for inclusion in the curriculum frameworks. Participants providing input were encouraged to do so via a survey that RIDE developed. This process included proactively reaching out to individuals, organizations, associations, and groups representative of Rhode Island’s ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and identity-based communities. This process was purposeful and included historically silenced or erased communities. In addition, the intent was to develop an active feedback process that engaged communities rather than a more traditional and passive approach to soliciting feedback. Thus, as part of this process, communities had options to participate in virtual feedback sessions using a presentation and survey provided, as well as to share the survey itself with their own memberships.

During this engagement process, the RIHSSAC received over 900 survey responses from communities, organizations, and individuals across Rhode Island, which were analyzed and summarized in a report provided to the RIHSSAC. Based on this activity, the RIHSSAC found that, although the GSEs met all the criteria to some extent, significant revisions were needed. In particular, the advisory committee recommended that the revised standards decrease the total number of standards, emphasize depth over breadth, and be more culturally responsive.

In the fall of 2021, RIDE convened a sub-committee of the RIHSSAC to begin developing a draft of revised social studies standards. These standards were designed to be fewer in number and to repeat at each grade level. They were also designed to be culturally responsive. To achieve this, the revised standards were designed to emphasize inquiry-based skills essential to helping students learn a wide range of social studies content. These standards were also designed to be part of a more comprehensive social studies curriculum framework that would provide scope and sequences of content from kindergarten through high school.

The development team completed a draft set of standards in the spring of 2022. Once these standards were completed, RIDE began the task of developing scope and sequences of social studies content for each grade level from kindergarten through middle school and for five courses in high school. In the fall of 2022, initial drafts of the scope and sequences were completed.

Once there were complete drafts of the standards and scope and sequences of content, RIDE began to share the drafts with and solicit feedback from a wide range of stakeholder groups through in-person and virtual sessions. A variety of stakeholder groups were consulted throughout the course of reviewing the standards and the scope and sequences of content. This included the following:

- The Rhode Island History and Social Studies Advisory Committee (RIHSSAC)
- Classroom educators
- RI Civic Learning Coalition
- Holocaust and Genocide Education Commission
- Civics Task Force
- Commissioner’s Student Advisory Group
- RI Civic Learning Coalition - Youth Ambassadors
- Rhode Island Historical Society Teen Advisory Board
- General public

As part of this feedback process, a variety of revisions were made. One substantive revision was to reorganize the standards and scope and sequences into anchor standards and content standards respectively. Next, the complete draft of the revised Rhode Island Social Studies standards was available for public review and input from November 21, 2022, to December 19, 2022. The standards were posted on the RIDE website and a feedback form was provided for stakeholders to share their feedback.

Based on the feedback provided by stakeholders and the public input, RIDE made numerous revisions and changes. As mentioned above, it is important to know that these standards are designed to be a component of the Social Studies Curriculum Framework that will be published in the fall of 2023. Included in the following pages is additional guidance on how to read and understand how the anchor standards and content standards work together to be the Rhode Island Social Studies Standards. Additional guidance documents will be developed to support districts and teachers in implementing the Rhode Island Social Studies Standards.

What is provided in this document is the culmination of all this work: The complete set of Rhode Island Social Studies Anchor Standards and Content Standards.

## EMPHASIZING ACADEMIC RIGOR

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The Rhode Island Social Studies Standards use a four-part hierarchy of cognitive skills designed to support a consistent approach to inquiry of social studies content. This hierarchy is applied to all anchor standards and content standards and is denoted by using four verbs: *Identify*, *Explain*, *Analyze*, and *Argue*. This four-part hierarchy supports depth by providing a consistent and predictable approach to understanding complexity and rigor that benefits both teachers and students. Next is a brief description and definition of each level of rigor.

1. **Identify:** When the verb *identify* is used, students learn key concepts and ideas, such as knowledge of people and events, the ability to locate places on a map, and the like.
2. **Explain:** When the verb *explain* is used, students articulate how key ideas relate to each other conceptually. For example, this could include explaining the roles people fulfill, how things work, and the sequence or course of events.
3. **Analyze:** When the verb *analyze* is used, students examine how key concepts operate in real contexts. This can include understanding of differences and similarities, making comparisons, and communicating more complex relationships, and how they play out in real life. Being able to analyze also implies being able to evaluate evidence from primary and secondary sources, as well assessing complexity through multiple perspectives.
4. **Argue:** When the verb *argue* is used, students make logical, evidence-based assertions, and consider and rebut opposing arguments. Embedded within this understanding is the ability to analyze history and make evidence-based arguments that examine the impact of ideas and actions, unpack policy decisions, and support advocacy and innovative improvements to society and the world. It is important to mention here an explicit connection to Rhode Island’s English Language Arts standards. In Kindergarten through 5th grade, students focus on developing and supporting opinions by presenting one point of view supported by reasons and information from sources or personal experiences. In grades 6 through 12, students craft arguments, presenting multiple perspectives supported by evidence from various sources. However, the macrostructure of both opinion and argument are the same: students share their thinking with reasons - including examples and evidence. *Argue* is used throughout the K-12 standards to ensure the development of these critical thinking skills.

## EMPHASIZING CULTURAL RESPONSIVENESS

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As mentioned in the background section, the Rhode Island Social Studies Standards are designed to inform a culturally responsive and inquiry-based approach to Social Studies teaching and learning. One of the key criteria in the [RIGL 16-22-30](#) legislation stipulates that academic standards and curriculum frameworks will “instill respect for the cultural, ethnic, and racial diversity of this state, and for the contributions made by diverse cultural, ethnic, and racial groups to the life of this state.” Moreover, standards and curriculum guidance documents must “be designed to avoid perpetuating gender, cultural, ethnic, or racial stereotypes.” To that end, the Rhode Island Social Studies Standards were written to meet these requirements.

Prior to the revision of Rhode Island’s social studies standards, RIDE had developed multiple tools to support the adoption, creation, and utilization of high-quality curriculum materials, characterized by their cultural responsiveness. To stay consistent with this work, RIDE identified four CRSE design principles that were used to inform the development of the anchor standards and content standards. Next is a brief description of each principle:

**Diverse Identities:** The Rhode Island Social Studies Standards are intended to:

1. validate and affirm individuals’ diverse and intersectional identities, where the term *intersectional* refers to the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, gender, ability, religion, etc. as they apply to a given individual or group, and regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage<sup>1</sup>,
2. elevate the voices and perspectives of traditionally excluded groups while ensuring the funds of knowledge and cultural capital of students, families, and their communities are central to the learning process<sup>2</sup>, and
3. avoid minimizing or ignoring unpleasant realities (e.g., oppression, prejudice, racism, sexism, etc.)<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Coomer, M. N., Skelton, S. M., Kyser, T. S., Warren, C., & Thorius, K. A. K. (2017). Assessing bias In standards and curricular materials. Equity Tool. Indianapolis, IN: Great Lakes Equity Center.; Hollie, S., & Allen, B. (2018). *Culturally and linguistically responsive teaching and learning: Classroom practices for student success*. Shell Education.

<sup>2</sup>Moll, L. C., Amanti, C., Neff, D., & Gonzalez, N. (1992). Funds of knowledge for teaching: Using a qualitative approach to connect homes and classrooms. *Theory Into Practice*, 31(2), 132–141  
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00405849209543534>; New York State Dept. of Education. (2018). Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education Framework. Retrieved 2021 from <https://www.nysed.gov/crs/framework>; Rhode Island Department of Education. (2021). Review Tools to Support Selection of HQCM. Rhode Island Department of Education: Instruction & Assessment. Retrieved November 2021, from <https://www.ride.ri.gov/InstructionAssessment/Curriculum.aspx#4379310-hqcm-review-tools>.

<sup>3</sup>Coomer, M. N., Skelton, S. M., Kyser, T. S., Warren, C., & Thorius, K. A. K. (2017). Assessing bias In standards and curricular materials. Equity Tool. Indianapolis, IN: Great Lakes Equity Center.

**Cultural Awareness:** The Rhode Island Social Studies Standards are intended to:

1. take into account, and leverage, student cultural dimensions that impact how they acquire and demonstrate learning<sup>4</sup>,
2. support students in understanding the ways their identities, culture, and experiences affect, and at times limit, their perspectives,
3. allow students to learn from their peers and from perspectives beyond their scope<sup>5</sup>.

**Instructional Engagement:** The Rhode Island Social Studies Standards are intended to:

1. require educators to take into account the specific contexts within which they work, and students live (demographics, political context and popular culture; urban, rural, or suburban; school, community, town, city, state, country; state of the world)<sup>6</sup>, and
2. drive approaches that support healthy social-emotional development.

**Critical Consciousness:** The Rhode Island Social Studies Standards are intended to:

1. help students make sense of and critique the world around them, naming and acting upon the “norms, values, mores, and institutions that produce and maintain inequities.”<sup>7</sup>, and
2. help build students’ abilities as citizens<sup>8</sup> to recognize and move to act against bias, stereotypes, and inequities in their immediate environment, their communities, and the world around them<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> Gay, G. (2000). Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research, and Practice. Teachers College Press.; Powell, R., Cantrell, S. C., & Rightmyer, E. (2013). Teaching and reaching all students: An instructional model for closing the gap. *Middle School Journal*, 44(5), 22–30.

<sup>5</sup> New York State Dept. of Education. (2018).

<sup>6</sup> Milner, R. H. (2020). *Start Where You Are, But Don't Stay There, Second Edition: Understanding Diversity, Opportunity Gaps, and Teaching in Today's Classrooms* (2nd Edition). Harvard Education Press.

<sup>7</sup> Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). But that's just good teaching! the case for culturally relevant pedagogy. *Theory Into Practice*, 34(3), 159–165.

<sup>8</sup> Throughout this document, the term 'citizen' is not used in a strict legal sense. When used in this document, it typically refers to anyone who is an active and responsible participant in society. This civic-focused use of the word is not intended to discount the narrower use to individuals with full rights under a particular system of government. See page 26 of *Educating for American Democracy: Excellence in History and Civics for All Learners report* (2021) for more information about the dual meanings of “citizen” and 'citizenship.'

<sup>9</sup> New York State Dept. of Education. (2018).