

Social Studies Advisory Committee

February 1, 2025

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Recommendation: That the School Board make specific instruction on hand-written note-taking a top priority for Social Studies courses, both for in-class lectures and out-of-class reading assignments, beginning in the 8th Grade when all APS students all take World Geography. APS should make appropriate resources available to Social Studies faculty to teach effective note-taking. While APS should permit considerable flexibility in the instruction, substantive instruction on handwritten notes should be integrated into the curriculum each year, throughout the academic year, in every Social Studies class.

Alignment to Strategic Plan

Priority: Student Academic Growth and Success ▾

Performance Objective: College, Career & Civic Readiness ▾

Strategies:

- *Increase opportunities for students to engage in learning activities that are not completed on devices with a focus on balancing authentic use of technology with hands-on activities; engaging students in authentic tasks with real-world connections*
- *Intensified and extended learning opportunities that enable students to develop knowledge and skills that align with learning needs, personal interest and cultural relevance*
- *Employability skill development across all curricular areas*
- *Implement processes to reduce reliance upon screens while students are in school*

SUMMARY

The Social Studies Advisory Committee recommends that the School Board make specific instruction on handwritten note-taking a top priority for Social Studies courses, both for in-class lectures and out-of-class reading assignments, beginning in the 8th Grade. Currently, explicit note-taking instruction is taking place across APS's middle and high schools, but it is most rigorous in upper high school AP/IB classes. However, it is unclear how consistent note-taking instruction is taking place across schools, particularly in GenEd. Additionally, SSAC's student members report that if formal note-taking instruction is offered in a class, students are not given sufficient instruction in how to successfully implement note-taking strategies to excel on exams or to synthesize texts. Note-taking instruction itself is not assessed at the state level, but it is relevant to many academic skills that are assessed, and research shows that hand-written notes help students retain information and understand material better than typed notes. Because all APS students take World Geography in 8th grade, this presents as an excellent opportunity both to push out similar instruction to all APS students and to prepare students for more rigorous high school classes where note-taking will be an important aspect of student success.

Budgetary Implications: None

Committee vote: SSAC took a preliminary vote on measure: passed 8-0, on January 16, 2025

Detail

Effective note-taking is essential to reading comprehension, and to fostering the ability to read lengthy texts, retain more of what one reads, and accurately synthesize material from multiple sources. These are skills that will be needed for success post-graduation in both higher education and in employment. Developing these skills through handwritten notes is especially crucial in the age of A.I., which is often marketed as a way for students to complete work faster, without needing to go through the struggle of learning it for themselves. It is crucial to reinforce to students, now more than ever, that, regardless of their reliance on A.I. in the future, students need to engage with written and spoken material for themselves, that learning takes a considerable amount of time and effort, and that no algorithm can learn for you. Providing more specific instruction of effective note-taking can also provide an opportunity for students to learn what A.I. can, cannot, and should not be used for in their studies.

Research (see references below) has shown that handwritten notes foster learning and retention better than typing. One reason is simply that electronic devices can be distracting for students. Additionally, as [this article states](#), students who type notes during a lecture tend to transcribe what is being said more than process the meaning of what they are hearing. Handwritten notes, on the other hand, encourage “processing information and reframing it in their own words.”¹

Our recommendation– that APS consistently offer instruction of handwritten note-taking starting in 8th grade–has the potential to vastly improve reading comprehension, analytical creativity, and information literacy not just in Social Studies classes but in all disciplines. Instruction should be focused on improving mastery of note-taking as well as effective usage of notes. Lessons should stress how to use notes as a study aid for exams, a resource for writing papers, and a tool to synthesize and retain information. There should also be an emphasis on real-world applications of careful note-taking beyond the classroom and test preparation. Instructors should have considerable flexibility regarding how they teach this crucial skill.

References

- DeZure, Deborah, et al. “Research on Student Notetaking: Implications for Faculty and Graduate Student Instructors.” *CRLT Occasional Papers*, Jennifer Lutman, 2001, crlt.umich.edu/sites/default/files/resource_files/CRLT_no16.pdf.

Student guide for effective note taking strategies. This displays key methods to take notes which work for many others all around the world in addition to other methods of utilizing notes at different times. This better shows how it may be required to use notes in different ways ranging from whether you are in school or at home and how to effectively use your notes for your needs.

¹ Pam A. Mueller and Daniel M. Oppenheimer, “The Pen is Mightier than the Keyboard: Advantages of Longhand Over Laptop Note Taking,” *Psychological Science* 2014, Vol. 25, No. 6: 1159-1168. URL: https://www.unlv.edu/sites/default/files/page_files/24/Advantages%20of%20Longhand.pdf. Accessed Jan. 27, 2025.

- Stapleton-Corcoran, Erin. "Note-Taking | Center for the Advancement of Teaching Excellence | University of Illinois Chicago." *University of Illinois Chicago*
teaching.uic.edu/cate-teaching-guides/inclusive-equity-minded-teaching-practices/note-taking/.

This guide depicts that note taking is used for many classes and is a necessary skill to have. To be able to create effective and usable notes, there are different steps which you should take. These steps include Listening, Cognitive Processing, Recording, Learning Content and Reviewing, then combining these steps with a note taking method or structure will result in improved notes.

- Jesper, Steph. "Subject Guides: Note-Taking: A Practical Guide: Note-Taking."
Subjectguides.york.ac.uk, subjectguides.york.ac.uk/note-taking.

This resource illustrates the use of notes as well as its effect on students. Note-taking improves grades, students ability to understand and comprehend the material being learned, improves memorization, and overall organization.

- Mueller, Pam , and Daniel Oppenheimer. "The Pen Is Mightier than the Keyboard: Advantages of Longhand over Laptop Note Taking." *Association for Psychological Science*, 16 Jan. 2014,
www.unlv.edu/sites/default/files/page_files/24/Advantages%20of%20Longhand.pdf.

This resource explains that laptop note-takers often transcribe lectures word for word, leading to shallower cognitive processing. In contrast, writing notes by hand requires summarizing and paraphrasing, which fosters deeper understanding. The study suggests that even when distractions are minimized, laptops may impair learning due to this difference in processing depth.

Staff Response: Staff fully supports this recommendation.

Appendix: Sample Note-Taking Resources:

[Notes Slide Deck 1](#)

[Notes Slide Deck 2](#)