

Social Studies Advisory Committee
MARCH 20, 2025 FINAL RECOMMENDATION (edits highlighted)

Recommendation: That the School Board Align the 5th and 6th grade social studies curriculum to the course sequence defined in VDOE's 2023 History and Social Studies Standards of Learning.

Members

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Alignment to Strategic Plan

Priority: Student Academic Growth and Success ▾

Performance Objective: SOL Proficiency ▾

Strategies:

- Deliver curriculum through differentiated instruction aligned to the Virginia Standards of Learning.
- Provide Professional Development.

SUMMARY

Currently in APS, the standards for US History I and US History II are taught in one course (“US History”) in the 6th grade, encompassing American Prehistory to the Present (21st Century). By combining two courses into one, the curriculum is content-dense in its pace and sequence, moving from unit to unit rapidly. SSAC proposes moving some of the US History I standards to the 5th grade, and discontinuing “Ancient Civilizations”, the course currently taught in 5th grade. **This change would fully align APS’ social studies curriculum with the new VA state standards; and therefore, to APS’ Strategic Plan (see “Strategies”, first bullet point).** Additionally, APS would finally follow traditional course progressions in social studies across the country, which would make relevant resources more readily available to APS 5th grade students.

SSAC believes that this realignment would overall strengthen APS’ social studies program through many additional benefits delineated below.

Budgetary Implications

This proposal is budget neutral and may present cost savings for APS.

The Social Studies Office will need to acquire textbooks for 5th grade regardless of this recommendation as the Office only renewed their online text for the current course, “Ancient Civilizations” for one year. APS will either need to renew the current contract for “Ancient Civilizations” or purchase new books to teach US History I in the 5th grade. If the budget does not allow, the Social Studies office could shift physical textbooks from the 6th to the 5th grade (approximately 30 textbooks per school), and use APS’ digital license (which is on a six year term) to teach the rest of US History I in the 6th grade.

By not purchasing “Ancient Civilizations” textbooks, APS may realize a cost SAVINGS of \$48,500.

The Social Studies Office would allocate existing funds for development of the 5th grade curriculum as well as a revision to the 6th grade course.

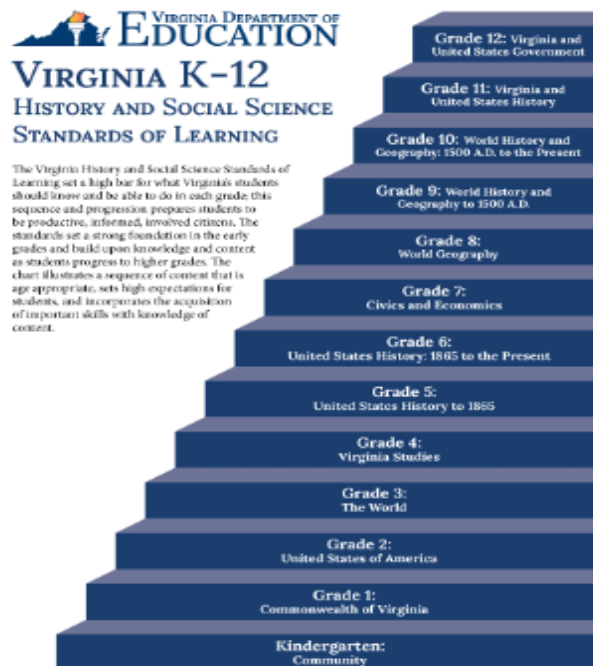
The Social Studies Office would offer professional learning to 5th grade teachers to help with the transition to new content. This cost would also be budget neutral.

Committee vote: 8 in favor, 0 opposed **Date:** 1/16/25

Staff Response Staff fully supports this recommendation.

Detail

In 2023, the VA Department of Education (VDOE) voted to approve a new K-12 Social Studies Standards of Learning Paradigm. See pictorial representation below and [click here](#) for full VDOE guidance for 5th and 6th grade SOLs.



These new Standards of Learning do not align with how APS teaches history in the 5th grade. The current APS fifth grade course, "Ancient Civilizations," was designed prior to recommendations from the state and focuses on World History. The course draws from "World History II" (9th grade, 10th grade) and "The World" (3rd grade). **Not only is the content somewhat repetitive; but it also lacks rigor, as many available materials were designed for third graders.** Since the current course does not align with the state recommended scope and sequence, nor does it align to what many other districts around the country are teaching in 5th grade, there is a lack of resources available to 5th grade students.

Meanwhile, US History I and II is taught solely in the 6th grade; and is very content-dense, moving from unit to unit quickly. Many students struggle with the pacing of the program, including students with and without disABILITIES, as well as English Learners.

In the VDOE's Standard of Learning guidelines, 5th grade encompasses "United States History to 1865", and the 6th grade continues US History from "1865 to the Present". SSAC proposes that the Social Studies Office consults with elementary principals and teachers while redesigning this new course progression, allowing these important stakeholders input into how much content should be taught in the fifth grade. (For example, the course does not have to have a firm end at 1865; it can naturally stop at the American Revolution instead. The rest of the American History I/II curriculum can resume in the sixth grade.)

By teaching US History I/II in both the 5th and 6th grades, not only will APS align with state SOL standards, but additional benefits will include:

- **A better and more natural transition from VA History in 4th grade to US History in 5th grade.** Given the significance of VA history in colonial times and post-independence, the linkages between state and national history can be further enhanced in the 4th grade. Additionally, the 5th grade US History curriculum will not have to be so in-depth.
- **An easier transition from elementary school to middle school.** Teaching US History in both the 5th and 6th grades will provide continuity for rising middle school students, and may even improve social studies learning outcomes, as students will have been already introduced to US History, and concepts the year beforehand. Familiarity with the textbook between the two grades will help students acclimate quickly to social studies instruction in middle school.
- **More equitable instruction.** Because 6th Grade US History II will be slower paced and sequenced to aid all students in learning and retaining social studies content, it will benefit any student who struggles with the rapid pace of the current 6th grade content including but not limited to English Learners and Students with disABILITIES.
- **More in-depth instruction opportunities.** Because APS teachers will have more time to teach US History, they will be able to spend more class time addressing particular historical events or issues, thus allowing students to gain more insight into these topics. More experiential learning activities can also take place through field trips, classroom "living museum" re-enactments and other opportunities.
- **Cost savings to APS.** When this recommendation is fully implemented, APS will no longer need the Ancient History textbook for 5th grade, which is estimated to cost \$48,400.

We propose that full implementation take place in the 2026-27 SY, with 5th grade starting in 2025-26; 6th in 2026-27, based on stakeholder input.

FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS:

LOSS OF WORLD HISTORY COURSE

SSAC acknowledges that the VDOE Social Studies K-12 curriculum focuses heavily on US History and that our students need exposure to other cultures; but at the same time, we cannot control the social studies instructional recommendations from the State. As Arlington Public Schools writes the curriculum to align with the 2023 Social Studies Standards, a global perspective can be infused into the curriculum. "As an example, West African cultures can be introduced and taught when studying legalized US African American chattel slavery trade in the 17th-19th century.

World History is taught in the 3rd ("The World"), and 8th grade ("World Geography"). Several World History courses for [verified](#) and [elective](#) credit are also offered in high school. SSAC can look into possibly reintroducing "Ancient Civilizations" as a middle school elective course in future years.

In the end, SSAC feels that the benefits of slower sequencing and pacing of US History I/II in the 6th grade outweigh the negatives.

ALIGNMENT WITH OTHER APS ELEMENTARY-LEVEL PROGRAMS

While revising the fifth grade curriculum, SSAC recommends that the Social Studies Office look for areas where social studies can align further with English Language Arts and Science.

In the English Language Arts (ELA) program, many 5th grade teachers find themselves utilizing the Core Knowledge Language Arts (CKLA) curricula to teach history. CKLA utilizes some historical concepts for materials; however, they are not aligned to any social studies curriculum. Moreover, the units are designed to teach literacy and do not teach students how to think about social studies concepts, including civics, economics and geography. Despite this, there is more opportunity for alignment with ELA if US History were to be adopted as the 5th grade curriculum. SSAC encourages the Social Studies Office to work with the ELA Office to find alignment with both curricula.

SSAC agrees with the Science Advisory Committee (SAC) that APS' instructional time [Policy Implementation Procedures](#) (PIPs) must be adhered to in the fourth and fifth grade to allow for both subjects to be taught with fidelity. Per I-6 PIP-1:

"... All elementary students receive regular social studies instruction on a daily basis. Arlington Public Schools elementary history and social science instruction is recommended to be scheduled in every classroom: 1. daily for at least 30 minutes Grades K-3 and at least or 45 minutes Grades 4-5 or 2. weekly overall for 150 minutes Grades K-3 or and for 225 minutes Grades 4-5."¹

Currently, science and history are combined into a period called "content time" in many elementary schools, where history is taught in the fourth grade and science in the fifth grade due to SOL test schedules. Furthermore, school-based staff reports that science and social studies are both being squeezed out during the day because of the longer instructional times required by ELA and Math. For our recommendation to succeed in practice, US History I must be taught uniformly across all elementary schools AND APS must ensure adequate social studies instructional time across the system so that students will be ready for the continuation of US History I/II in the sixth grade without gaps in content knowledge.

SSAC and the Social Studies Office will work with the SAC/Science Office to look for alignment of the 4th and 5th grade curriculums as suggested at the January 28 School Board Work Session.

¹ The same instructional time guidelines apply for Elementary School Science.

Appendices

Proposed Revision of 5th & 6th Grade Curriculum

	Current 5th Grade	Proposed 5th Grade
Course	Ancient World History	U.S. History I
Alignment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does not align to state standards Was developed when there was no guidance from the state. Follows World History II curriculum (9th grade course) and is repetitive of the 3rd grade curriculum. 	Aligns to the 2023 History and Social Science Standards of Learning for Kindergarten - Grade 12 .
Considerations	<p>Limited grade level resources, as this course is not common in Virginia or nationally.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fairfax is the only district in Virginia that has offered it. Resources often lack rigor because teachers use 3rd grade materials. 	<p>Could be flexible on standards taught.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Propose that 5th grade just teach standards 1-6 and 6th grade teach standards 7-13, plus U.S. History II standards. Students have developed background knowledge relevant to the U.S. History I SOLs through 2nd grade and 4th grade Virginia Studies. This background knowledge will enable students to more readily grasp USI content and skills as well as set the stage for students ready for intensified content and inquiry. The Social Studies Office would build out unit plans for teachers. <p>Re: Losing “Ancient Civilizations” course in 5th</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In new standards, US History is taught from a global context Slower sequencing and pacing in 6th grade outweigh the negatives of losing “Ancient Civilizations”.
SOL	No SOL	No SOL
PBA	2 Project Based Assessments	2 Project Based Assessments
CKLA Alignment	<p>CKLA does not align with social studies standards or sequencing.</p> <p>Possible alignment and connections:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Language Studio 2: Early American Civilizations 	<p>CKLA does not align with social studies standards or sequencing.</p> <p>Possible alignment and connections:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Language Studio 2: Early American Civilizations Language Studio 5: The Renaissance Language Studio 6: The Reformation Language Studio 8: Native Americans
Resource	<p>History Alive! By TCI</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Only purchased 1 year. Will likely not be purchased next year. 	<p>Our America to 1865 by Five Ponds Press</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Texts can be shifted from 6th to 5th grade. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Each elementary school would have 30 texts. Additional texts to purchase: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teacher’s Editions = 38 Student Texts (if we want 1 per student) = 1,472

US History Proposed 5th Grade Plan by Quarter			
Quarter 1	Quarter 1/2	Quarter 3	Quarter 4
Unit 1	Unit 2	Unit 3	Unit 4
Geography & Early Cultures of North America 3 weeks USI.1 The student will apply history and social science skills to understand the geography of North America by a. locating North America in relation to the other continents and the oceans; b. locating and describing major geographic regions and bodies of water of North America and their impact on the early history of the United States; and c. locating the 50 states. USI.2 The student will apply history and social science skills to describe how early cultures developed throughout North America by a. describing how archaeologists have recovered artifacts from ancient settlements including, but not limited to Cactus Hill in Virginia; and b. locating and explaining where Indigenous people lived prior to the arrival of Europeans, with an emphasis on how the various geographic regions they inhabited influenced their daily lives.	European Colonization 4 weeks USI.3 The student will apply history and social science skills to explain European exploration and colonization in North America by a. describing the motivations for, obstacles to, and accomplishments of the Dutch, English, French, Portuguese, and Spanish explorations; and b. describing cultural and economic interactions between Indigenous people and Europeans that led to cooperation and conflict. USI.4 The student will apply history and social science skills to understand how the Western Hemisphere impacted West Africa by a. identifying the location and characteristics of West African societies of Ghana, Mali, and Songhai before European exploration; b. examining the arrival of the first Africans to colonial America at Old Point Comfort (Fort Monroe); c. explaining the Transatlantic Slave Trade and its impact on the African coast and the Western Hemisphere; and d. identifying the cultural connections, conflicts, and common values of enslaved people in the Western Hemisphere, as well as challenges and hardships endured by enslaved people brought to colonial America.	Colonial America 4 weeks USI.5 The student will apply history and social science skills to explain the geographic factors that shaped colonial America by a. describing the characteristics and differences among the New England, the Mid-Atlantic, and the Southern colonies; b. explaining Virginia's importance as one of the most populous and wealthiest colonies; c. comparing life from the perspectives of various groups including, but not limited to large landowners, farmers, artisans, clergy, merchants, women, indentured servants, and enslaved and free Blacks; d. explaining the specialization and interdependence of the regions; and e. explaining the changing political and economic relationships between the colonies and Great Britain including, but not limited to representative government and self-rule in the colonies.	The American Revolution 4 weeks USI.6 The student will apply history and social science skills to explain the American Revolution by a. identifying the causes and effects of the French and Indian War; b. identifying the issues of dissatisfaction that led to the American Revolution including, but not limited to the "injuries and usurpations" outlined in the Declaration of Independence; c. comparing and contrasting the political ideas and principles that shaped the revolutionary movement; d. describing the leadership roles of individuals including, but not limited to George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, Patrick Henry, Thomas Paine, John Adams, and the Marquis de Lafayette; and e. examining the causes, course, and consequences of key events and battles of the era.

Note: 6th grade will encompass the rest of US History I/II. The Social Studies Office is still in consultation with elementary school principals and teachers on course progression by quarter and unit.