



Questions and Answers: Minnesota K-12 Academic Standards in Social Studies Committee Third Draft

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What are Minnesota K-12 Academic Standards?

Minnesota's K-12 Academic Standards are the statewide expectations for student learning in K-12 public schools. School districts and charter schools are required to teach these standards to ensure that all Minnesota students have access to high-quality content and instruction.

What is an Academic Standard?

An academic standard is a summary description of student learning in a content area. Each standard contains one or more benchmarks.

What is a Benchmark?

A benchmark supplements a standard and is the specific knowledge and/or skill that a student must master to meet part of an academic standard by the end of a grade level or grade band.

Why are the academic standards in social studies being revised now?

Minnesota's academic standards are reviewed and revised on a 10-year cycle. One content area of academic standards is reviewed and revised each year based on a schedule approved by the Minnesota legislature. Social studies is the content area that is currently up for review and revision.

How are Minnesota's standards reviewed and revised?

In order to develop Minnesota's rigorous academic standards, Minnesotans with content knowledge from varying perspectives and backgrounds draft the academic standards for Minnesota public schools. The process of reviewing and revising academic standards begins with the formation of a standards committee. Any Minnesotan may apply to serve on a standards review committee. For the social studies standards, an application period was open from March 2 to June 30, 2020 for Minnesotans to apply to participate in the social studies standards committee. In July 2020, the committee was selected.

Who makes up the social studies standards committee?

The Minnesota K-12 Academic Standards in Social Studies committee has 36 members, and includes K-12 teachers, administrators, college faculty, informal educators, and community members. Minnesota Statutes outline who must be represented on the committee, including parents, currently licensed and in the classroom teachers, licensed school administrators, school board members, post-secondary institution faculty teaching core subjects, and business community members.

[Updated 12/27/22] What is the Commissioner Approved Draft, posted in December 2022?

MDE made some revisions to benchmark language in response to expert review and commissioner review. Those revisions are included in the Commissioner Approved Draft, which is the document that will continue through the Rulemaking Process. The Commissioner approved draft replaces the Third Draft of the 2021 Social Studies Standards.

[Updated 12/27/22] How are social studies standards organized?

The academic standards and their supporting benchmarks are organized into five strands: Citizenship and Government, Economics, Geography, U.S and World History, and Ethnic Studies. The contributions of Minnesota's American Indian tribes and communities integrated into each strand and all standards. Each of the strands have between three and six standards. The standards may contain one or more benchmarks at each grade-level. There is not a benchmark at every grade level for every standard. A benchmark is a supplement to the standard and is the specific knowledge and/or skill that a student must accomplish to meet part of an academic standard by the end of each K-8 grade level. The social studies standards and benchmarks for the high school are grade-banded (9-12th grade) and that are developed to provide structure for the content students must meet in the three and a half credits required for graduation. At the high school level specifically, the standards do not correlate to specific course names. The standards are the knowledge and/or skills that students must master to meet graduation requirements, and can be taught through locally determined courses.

[Update 09/11/23] What is the Statement of Need and Reasonableness (SONAR)?

The SONAR is a supporting document prepared by the Minnesota Department of Education. It explains the process followed by the committee in the course of the revision, and details why each of the anchor standards is both necessary and reasonable. It is intended to provide background on the proposed rule for decision makers and the public. It is a standard part of agency rulemaking processes in [Minnesota Statutes 2022, section 14.131](#).

What is curriculum and how does it relate to the academic standards?

Academic standards are not curriculum. Curriculum are the resources, assessments, learning experiences, and plans that educators utilize at the local level to instruct students on the content of the academic standards. By statute ([Minnesota Statutes 2022, section 120B.021, subd. 2\(b\)](#)), Minnesota academic standards do not require a specific curriculum. Districts, schools, and educators make curriculum and instruction decisions to support the teaching and student mastery of standards. As a result, local school districts, schools and educators choose what curriculum is used and what classes are taught in their schools to ensure that students meet the academic standards. Ultimately, local educators make the decisions about "how" to deliver instruction to meet the rigorous learning expectation of the academic standards.

Is Critical Race Theory part of the standards?

Critical Race Theory is not included in any current or proposed Minnesota K-12 Academic Standards. Critical Race Theory is a theory that was developed in the 1970s by legal scholars. It may be taught in some master's or doctoral-level programs. Families that have questions about what is being taught in classrooms should reach out to their teachers and school leaders.