



Teaching and Learning Secondary Social Studies in Georgia

A Position Statement from the Georgia Council for the Social Studies (GCSS)

Prepared by the GCSS Task Force for Teaching and Learning
Social Studies at the Middle and Secondary Level in Georgia
Benjamin Ridgeway and Valerie Frey Stone, co-chairs
Trish Klein, primary author
Michael Boyd, Scott Myers, Kim Stewart, and Nadine Wright

This statement sets forth the opinion of the GCSS as to the critical role of social studies in the curriculum and how it should be viewed and implemented in Georgia to produce the levels of social understanding and civic efficacy that our state and nation require of their citizens. It is offered for those who make decisions about and have concern for social studies instruction, including, but not limited to, legislators, administrators at all levels, teachers, parents, and other concerned citizens.

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Rationale

Students in grades 6-12 are emerging citizens who need to be prepared for active citizenship in an interdependent, culturally diverse, democratic society. This preparation for a well-informed citizen requires that students take ownership of their learning and be given opportunities to develop the skills to answer questions, solve problems, and make decisions. Effective and challenging social studies instruction provides the knowledge and skills for students to be successful in their post-secondary academic pursuits and to understand the world at a meaningful level.

The Goals of Effective Social Studies Instruction

As part of a systematically developed program to nurture civic efficacy and global participation, social studies instruction at the secondary level should allow students to

- Study the growing complexities of the human experience from prehistory to the present
- Investigate the state of the current world including the choices people have made and convictions they have held
- Analyze political systems and their effect on the people they are created to govern
- Examine the interaction between people and their environments, as well as analyze how human life is shaped by the distribution of physical and human resources
- Explore the social systems – community, work, legal, financial, family, beliefs, customs – that determine a people’s way of life and create structure for both individual and group behavior
- Study cultures through myths, religion, science, technology, economics, and art in order to understand how people strive toward a sense of meaning
- Develop strategies for being successful in an ever-changing, dynamic world
- Examine the competencies needed to effectively meet and interact with the rest of the world

Implementing Effective Social Studies Instruction in the 21st Century

Social studies should be taught effectively and systematically in the secondary setting using strategies that develop in-depth content knowledge, as well as the critical thinking skills necessary to make sense of a complex world.

Effective pedagogical strategies* for teaching social studies include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Socratic seminars
- Visual Interpretations (maps, charts, graphs, tables, timelines, political cartoons, photographs, artifacts, graphic organizers, schedules, etc.)
- Interviews/oral histories (student-conducted, providing social studies concepts in a meaningful context)

- Writing (research reports, critical essays, news articles, propaganda, etc.)
- Inquiry-Based/Problem-Based/Research-Based Learning focused on social studies issues
- Research that leads to presentations at Social Science Fairs, History Day, Mock Trials, and other competitions or participatory events
- Teacher-posed provocative questions or statements to motivate critical thinking/perspective taking/discussion
- Student debates
- Community connections (field studies, resource speakers, case studies, and other experiential learning)
- School as a Social Studies Learning Lab – to develop citizen participation skills through group interactions such as cooperative problem-solving and learning, investigations, elections, class constitutions, and other simulations
- Opportunities for developing career goals, civic responsibility, and economic decision-making skills

*The integration of technology is assumed in many of these strategies.

The social studies teacher must employ a wide variety of resources beyond the textbook to actively engage students. Several state organizations provide resources that are beneficial to teachers:

- Georgia Humanities Council
- Georgia Council on Economic Education
- Georgia Archives
- Center for Civic Education
- Georgia Public Broadcasting
- The Southern Center for International Studies

Summary

The Georgia Council for the Social Studies holds that secondary social studies instruction is essential for the development of well-informed, reasonable, decision-makers in an interdependent, culturally diverse, democratic society. Secondary social studies classrooms should be active learning environments in which students develop and hone skills that will help to transform them into knowledgeable individuals, lifelong learners, and productive citizens.