

## 2011 Minnesota K-12 Academic Standards in Social Studies

### FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

**1. What is the purpose of Minnesota’s social studies standards?**

The state standards, known as the 2011 Minnesota K-12 Academic Standards in Social Studies, set the expectations for achievement in social studies for K-12 students in Minnesota. In setting these expectations, the standards and benchmarks help define the social studies requirements for credits and high school graduation. All students, including students with unique learning needs, must satisfactorily complete all social studies standards in order to graduate (Minn. Stat. § 120B.024, Subd. 1(5)).

The standards and benchmarks for a particular grade level (or a 9-12 grade band) describe the social studies content that is to be mastered by all students by the end of that grade level or band. School districts use the learning progressions of the benchmarks to guide their design of social studies curriculum, mapping “backwards” to determine when content needs to be introduced and practiced.

**2. When must the 2011 social studies standards be implemented? Can schools apply for waivers to opt out of, or delay, implementation?**

The 2011 social studies standards must be implemented by schools no later than the 2013-2014 school year (Minn. Stat. § 120B.023, Subd. 2(f)). There is no provision in state law for waivers that allow schools to opt out, or delay implementation, of the social studies standards and corresponding benchmarks.

**3. Where can I find the 2011 social studies standards?**

[View the 2011 Minnesota K-12 Academic Standards in Social Studies](http://education.state.mn.us/MDE/EdExc/StanCurri/K-12AcademicStandards)  
(<http://education.state.mn.us/MDE/EdExc/StanCurri/K-12AcademicStandards>).

**4. What are the statewide graduation requirements for social studies in Minnesota?**

All students are required to satisfactorily complete three and one-half (3.5) credits of social studies, encompassing at least United States history, geography, government and citizenship, world history, and economics sufficient to satisfy all of the academic standards in social studies (Minn. Stat. § 120B.024, Subd.1(5)). A one-half credit of economics taught in a school’s agriculture education or business department may fulfill a one-half credit in social studies if the credit is sufficient to satisfy all of the academic standards in economics (Minn. Stat. § 120B.024, Subd. 2(a)).

**5. Why were the 2004 social studies standards revised?**

The Commissioner is required by law to establish statewide academic standards and benchmarks for social studies in grades K-12 (Minn. Stat. §§ 120B.02, 120B.021, 120B.023), and to periodically review and revise the standards and benchmarks according to a schedule specified in law (Minn. Stat. § 120B.023, subd.2). This schedule requires that the 2004 social studies standards be reviewed and revised in 2010-2011. The revision schedule allows the standards in each subject to be periodically updated to reflect new knowledge in the discipline and enhanced understandings about how students learn. It also provides an opportunity for new legislative requirements to be reflected in the standards, such as college- and career-readiness knowledge and skills.

## **6. How were the 2011 social studies standards developed?**

In December 2010, Commissioner Seagren solicited applications from the public for the standards committee. In January 2011, Commissioner Cassellius convened a standards committee of more than 40 K-12 and postsecondary educators, business and government representatives, parents and other members of the public. The committee represented all regions of the state, school sizes and types (urban, suburban, and rural). Teachers on the committee represented the K-12 range of grade levels and the four social studies disciplines of civics, economics, geography, and history. Most of the teachers had expertise teaching two or more disciplines or grade levels, Advanced Placement or honors courses, and students with special needs and diverse backgrounds.

The 2011 standards are the result of an intensive fourteen-month process that involved the committee's study of national documents and reports on social studies education, examination of exemplary standards from other states, analysis of hundreds of comments submitted by the public online and at Town Hall meetings, and an unprecedented number of expert reviews. The committee's final draft proceeded through the state's formal administrative rulemaking process, including a public hearing that was held on December 20, 2012. The standards were officially adopted into rule on May 6, 2013 and became effective May 13, 2013.

For more information about the development of the 2011 standards, [view the Statement of Need and Reasonableness \(SONAR\)](http://education.state.mn.us/MDE/Welcome/Rule/ActiveRule/SocStudies/index.html) (<http://education.state.mn.us/MDE/Welcome/Rule/ActiveRule/SocStudies/index.html>).

## **7. What resources were consulted during the revision of the standards?**

The members of Minnesota's Social Studies Standards Committee consulted a variety of sources during the review and revision process including documents and reports of national significance, exemplary standards from other states and education organizations, analysis from expert reviewers and extensive public feedback.

National documents and reports on social studies education included the National Assessment on Educational Progress (NAEP) Frameworks and the "Nation's Report Card" for Civics, Economics, Geography, and U.S. History (World History was not available), and the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) themes and positions statements. Exemplary standards from other states included those from Massachusetts, Virginia and several other states that were ranked highly by the Fordham Foundation and the American Federation of Teachers. The committee also reviewed standards developed by Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL) and discipline-specific organizations such as the Council on Economic Education. The committee carefully considered more than 1,100 comments submitted by the public online and at Town Hall meetings across the state, analysis submitted by an unprecedented number of expert reviewers of the draft standards, and advice provided by numerous content and pedagogy experts.

Figure 1: Resources consulted by the 2010-2011 Social Studies Standards Committee.



**8. What new mandates and requirements were considered in the revision of the standards?**

In addition to research-based best practices in social studies, the 2011 standards reflect several legislative mandates and MDE guidelines given to the committee including the following—

- Grade-specific benchmarks in grades K-8 (Minn. Stat. §§ 120B.018, Subd. 3; 120B.023, Subd. 1)
- College- and career-readiness knowledge and skills (Minn. Stat. § 120B.021, Subd. 4)
- Contributions of Minnesota's American Indian tribes and communities (Minn. Stat. § 120B.021, Subd. 4)
- Technology and Information Literacy (Minn. Stat. § 120B.021, Subd. 4)
- Financial Literacy/personal finance (MDE guidelines)
- Geographic Information Systems (Minn. Stat. § 120B.021, Subd. 4 and MDE guidelines)

**9. Why do the 2011 social studies standards have grade-specific benchmarks?**

Minnesota Statutes, section 120B.023, Subdivision 1 requires that when standards are revised, benchmarks must be identified for each grade level in grades K-8 rather than clusters of grades or grade bands. Benchmarks may remain grade-banded in grades 9-12.

**10. Does a benchmark have to be taught at the specific grade where it appears?**

Yes. The standards are placed at the grade level where mastery is expected, with the understanding that there is a progression of learning experiences in earlier grades that builds the foundation for mastery at that grade level.

**11. Must students complete both the standards AND benchmarks?**

Yes, students must complete all of the 2011 social studies standards and benchmarks. According to state statute, "Schools must offer and students must achieve all benchmarks for an academic standard to satisfactorily complete that state standard." (Minn. Stat. § 120B.023, Subd. 1(a)).

**12. Are ALL students required to complete all of the standards?**

Yes, all students must complete all of the 2011 social studies standards and benchmarks. Students advancing through the grades are expected to meet each year's grade level (in grades K-8) or grade band (in grades 9-12) benchmarks, retain or further develop skills and understanding mastered in preceding grades, and work steadily toward meeting the college and career readiness expectations described by the standards. For students with disabilities or English language learners, these standards are not to be reduced or limited. For those with the most significant cognitive disabilities, the standards can be reduced in depth, breadth, and complexity while still providing students exposure to grade level instruction.

**13. What is a "standard"?**

An academic standard is a "summary description of student learning" in a content area (Minn. Stat. § 120B.018, Subd. 2). Each standard is comprised of one or more benchmarks that specify the knowledge and skills "that schools must offer and students must achieve...to satisfactorily complete that state standard." (Minn. Statute § 120B.023, Subd. 1)

Consistent with approach used in the 2010 ELA standards, the 2011 social studies standards are written as "anchor standards." Anchor standards are broad statements of skills and understandings that students must complete in order to be prepared for college and the highly skilled workplace. As such, the 2011 social studies standards are grounded or "anchored" in college and career readiness. Because they represent the "big picture," the anchor standards are repeated at multiple grade levels across K-12.

**14. What is a "benchmark"?**

Each anchor standard is comprised of one or more grade-level benchmarks. A benchmark is "specific knowledge or skill that a student must master to complete part of an academic standard by the end of the grade level or grade band." (Minn. Stat. § 120B.018, Subd. 3) "Schools must offer and students must achieve all benchmarks for an academic standard to satisfactorily complete that state standard." (Minn. Stat. § 120B.023, Subd.1).

The benchmarks are written as learning outcomes that are unique to each grade level and represent the learning that is to be mastered by the end of a particular grade (in grades K-8) or grade band (in grades 9-12). On average, each benchmark equals approximately 2-3 days of instructional time. The benchmarks for each anchor standard represent important steps in the progression of learning that spans several grades.

**15. What does it mean to “master” a benchmark? How is mastery determined?**

“Mastery” means that a student possesses and is able to display specific knowledge or skill. In Minnesota, there is no statewide assessment in social studies. Teachers must assess student mastery of knowledge and skills in the benchmarks through formal and/or informal assessments.

**16. Are the examples in the benchmarks optional?**

Yes, examples in the benchmarks are optional. Unlike the standards and benchmarks which are required by state statute, the examples are only provided in places where it seemed necessary to clarify the meaning of the benchmark or indicate the level of student understanding. Some examples suggest learning activities or instructional topics, *but in no case are they required to be taught*. Finally, the examples are not intended to be directives for curriculum or a comprehensive fulfillment of the benchmarks. Examples are identified in the benchmarks by the wording, “*For example:*”.

**17. Can schools teach more than what is stated in the standards?**

Yes, schools can teach more than what is stated in the standards. Additional local standards, if applicable, and curriculum and instructional approaches are determined at the local level by the school district.

**18. How do the 2011 social studies standards differ from the 2004 standards?**

Compared to the 2004 social studies standards, the 2011 revised standards feature:

- Overall K-12 focus on citizenship, and college- and career-readiness concepts and skills that prepare students for life in a more globally connected world.
- Added focus on technology and information literacy skills, including geospatial technologies in geography.
- Expanded content on personal finance in economics.
- Increased attention to the contributions of Minnesota’s American Indian people, especially in modern times.
- Fewer standards and benchmarks overall, allowing for varied types of curriculum and development of in-depth student understanding.
- An “anchor standard” approach. Anchor standards summarize the most important college- and career-readiness knowledge and skills and are repeated at multiple grade levels.
- Grade-specific benchmarks in grades K- 8. Benchmarks are unique to each grade level and are not repeated from one grade level to the next. A benchmark “grain size” that is neither too general nor specific, and which allows for a variety of instructional approaches.
- More consistency among benchmarks in terms of “grain size.” The grain size of each benchmark equates to 2-3 days of instruction, on average.
- Examples provided for benchmarks only as needed to clarify meaning or indicate the level of student understanding; long “laundry lists” of examples are avoided.

- Smoother progression of knowledge and skills from grade to grade.
- Better integration of all of the social studies disciplines at a given grade level, K-8.
- Greater balance among the social studies disciplines at each grade level, K-8.
- A new narrative introduction that includes a K-12 Sequence of Study graphic, an overview of the new standards at each grade level, and a list of the substrands (categories of standards) and anchor standards for each of the four social studies disciplines.

**19. Do the 2011 social studies standards overlap with the Literacy in History/Social Studies standards found in the 2010 English language arts standards?**

Social studies skills identified in the new standards complement, but do not duplicate, the social studies literacy skills found in the 2010 Minnesota K-12 Academic Standards in English Language Arts.

**20. What does the numerical code for each benchmark signify?**

The benchmarks for each standard are designated by five-digit codes. For example, in the code 5.3.4.10.1:

- The 5 refers to grade 5.
- The 3 refers to the third strand: Geography.
- The 4 refers to the fourth geography substrand: Human Environment Interaction.
- The 10 refers to the tenth geography anchor standard: The meaning, use, distribution and importance of resources changes over time.
- The 1 refers to the first benchmark for that anchor standard: Explain how geographic factors affected land use in the North American colonies.

Figure 2: Sample Benchmark

Grade	Strand	Sub-Strand	Standard Understand that...	Code	Benchmark
5	3. Geography	4. Human Environment Interaction	10. The meaning, use, distribution and importance of resources changes over time.	5.3.4.10.1	Explain how geographic factors affected land use in the North American colonies.  <i>For example:</i> Geographic factors—climate, landforms, availability of natural resources.

Note: Codes that begin with “0” indicate benchmarks that are to be mastered in kindergarten, while those that begin with “9” indicate benchmarks that are to be mastered in grades 9-12.

**21. When will the standards be revised again?**

The 2011 social standards will be reviewed and revised in 2019-2020.

**22. Where can a teacher go for resources to teach the 2011 social studies standards?**

[The Minnesota Center for Social Studies Education \(CSSE\)](http://csse.mnhs.org/) (<http://csse.mnhs.org/>) has resources to help schools implement the new social studies standards. Formed as a partnership between the Minnesota Department of Education and the Minnesota Historical Society, the CSSE offers professional development related to the new standards and maintains a comprehensive website with resources for each of the social studies disciplines.

**23. Whom should I contact at MDE if I have questions about the 2011 social studies standards?**

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- [Visit the MDE Social Studies webpage](http://education.state.mn.us/MDE/EdExc/StanCurri/K-12AcademicStandards/SocialStudies/index.html)  
(<http://education.state.mn.us/MDE/EdExc/StanCurri/K-12AcademicStandards/SocialStudies/index.html>)