

**A Sampler of**

**CURRICULUM STANDARDS  
FOR SOCIAL STUDIES:  
Expectations of Excellence**

**National Council for the Social Studies**

*Excerpted from the original by*  
**Walter C. Parker**  
**John Jarolimek**

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Complete copies of the National Council of Social Studies' *Curriculum Standards for Social Studies: Expectations of Excellence* may be ordered via the order form included in this publication.

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# INTRODUCTION TO THE SAMPLER

We present here excerpts from *Curriculum Standards for Social Studies: Expectations of Excellence*. These standards were developed by a task force of the National Council for the Social Studies in 1994 to answer the question, What should students know in the realm of social studies and when should they know it? They incorporate learning experiences from many disciplines—history, geography, anthropology, the humanities, and so forth. Accordingly, “teachers and curriculum designers are encouraged first to establish their program frameworks using the social studies standards as a guide, and then to use the standards from history, geography, civics, economics, and others to guide the development of grade level strands and courses.”<sup>1</sup>

The *Curriculum Standards for Social Studies* book has three components. First, there are ten thematic statements, from “culture” to “civic ideals.” Second, there are performance expectations for three levels: the early grades, middle grades, and high school. These describe more specifically the targets, that is, the “knowledge, skills, scholarly perspectives, and commitments to American democratic ideals” that students should be able to display at the three developmental levels. (Such levels are often called *benchmarks*.) Third, there are classroom activities, also called vignettes, related to each theme. Two or three vignettes are given for each theme at each of the three grade levels.

The book, *Curriculum Standards for Social Studies*, contains 178 pages from which we have excerpted the material in this *Sampler*. We encourage readers to examine the complete version. It can probably be found in the university’s curriculum library, and an order form is located in this *Sampler*. We also encourage readers to become members of the National Council for the Social Studies, the primary professional organization and network for teachers who are especially interested in the social studies. NCSS members not only receive a discount on the *Curriculum Standards for Social Studies* book, but numerous benefits and resources, not the least of which are opportunities for foreign travel with other teachers, local and national teachers’ workshops, news about curriculum resources, and a subscription to the quarterly journal of social studies teaching ideas, *Social Studies and the Young Learner*.

The contents of this *Sampler* are:

I. Purpose and Organization	p. 3
II. Ten Thematic Strands in Social Studies	p. 5
III. Standards into Practice: Examples for the <i>Early</i> Grades	p. 7
IV. Standards into Practice: Examples for the <i>Middle</i> Grades	p. 27

We hope you find the contents stimulating, and that you will, at some point, examine a copy of the complete version.

Walter C. Parker  
John Jarolimek  
Seattle, Washington

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<sup>1</sup> *Curriculum Standards for Social Studies*, p. vii.



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## THE SOCIAL STUDIES STANDARDS

Providing leadership in the profession, NCSS has published *Expectations of Excellence: Curriculum Standards for Social Studies*, a framework for powerful social studies instruction. Excerpts are included in this *Sampler* accompanying *Social Studies in Elementary Education*, 10th ed., by Parker & Jarolimek (©1997, Merrill/Prentice Hall).

The Standards present a model based on 10 thematic strands for achieving excellence at three distinct levels: early grades, middle grades, and high school. In addition to defining social studies and its mission, "to promote civic competence," this resource explains the purpose, organization, and utility of the 10 themes and their relationship to other standards in the field. Classroom activities and guidelines for assessing student performance are included. Appendices include the Essential Skills for Social Studies and a statement on democratic beliefs and values.



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*Expectations of Excellence*

CURRICULUM  
STANDARDS  
FOR  
SOCIAL  
STUDIES

*Developed by  
National Council for the Social Studies  
Washington, D.C., 1994*

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# I. PURPOSE AND ORGANIZATION

## What Is the Purpose of the Social Studies Standards?

Our world is changing rapidly. Students in our schools today, who will be the citizens of the twenty-first century, are living and learning in the midst of a knowledge explosion unlike any humankind has ever experienced. Because schools and teachers cannot teach everything and because students cannot learn all there is to know, this document focuses on three purposes for these standards. The social studies standards should:

1. serve as a framework for K–12 social studies program design through the use of ten thematic strands;
2. serve as a guide for curriculum decisions by providing performance expectations regarding knowledge, processes, and attitudes essential for all students; and
3. provide examples of classroom practice to guide teachers in designing instruction to help students meet performance expectations.

These social studies standards provide criteria for making decisions as curriculum planners and teachers address such issues as why teach social studies, what to include in the curriculum, how to teach it well to all students, and how to assess whether or not students are able to apply what they have learned. The ten thematic curriculum standards and accompanying sets of student performance expectations constitute an irreducible minimum of what is essential in social studies. Along with the examples of classroom practice, these standards and performance expectations help answer the following questions:

- How can the social studies curriculum help students construct an accurate and positive view of citizenship and become citizens able to address persistent issues, promote civic ideals and practices, and improve our democratic republic?
- What content themes are essential to the curriculum at every level (early, middle, and high school) because they address societal expectations and the needs of young future citizens and are drawn from disciplines and fields related to social studies and from other disciplines and fields that are natural allies of social studies?
- What are the student performance expectations at early, middle, and high school levels for knowledge, skills, attitudes, civic ideals, and practices that encompass social studies as an integrative field?
- How can learning opportunities be structured at each school level to help students meet social studies performance expectations?
- How might performance expectations be assessed to show that students have constructed an understanding that allows them to demonstrate and apply what they have learned?

## How Are the Social Studies Standards Organized?

The social studies standards present, in the next chapters of this document, a set of ten thematically based curriculum standards, corresponding sets of performance expectations, and illustrations of exemplary teaching and learning to foster student achievement of the standards at each school level.

A **curriculum standard** is a statement of what should occur programmatically in the formal schooling process; it provides a guiding vision of content and purpose. The social studies curriculum standards, designated by roman numerals, are expressed in thematic statements that begin: “Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of . . .” These curriculum experiences should enable students to exhibit the knowledge, skills, scholarly perspectives, and commitments to American democratic ideals identified in the **performance expectations**.

For each school level, two or three (in this *Sampler*, one) examples of **classroom activities** related to each theme appear in the “Standards into Practice” chapters. In each case, the performance expectations addressed



by the example are identified.

Since these themes are interdisciplinary, there is often a close relationship among performance expectations across the curriculum standards. To show these connections, roman numerals representing related themes are cross-referenced in the “Standards into Practice” chapters.

The ten themes that serve as organizing strands for the social studies curriculum at every school level are:

- I Culture
- II Time, Continuity, and Change
- III People, Places, and Environments
- IV Individual Development and Identity
- V Individuals, Groups, and Institutions
- VI Power, Authority, and Governance
- VII Production, Distribution, and Consumption
- VIII Science, Technology, and Society
- IX Global Connections
- X Civic Ideals and Practices

Two features of these curriculum strands are especially important. First, they are interrelated. To understand culture, for example, students need to understand time, continuity, and change; the relationship among people, places, and environments; and civic ideals and practices. To understand power, authority, and governance, students need to understand the relationship among culture; people, places, and environments; and individuals, groups, and institutions.

Second, the thematic strands draw from all of the social science disciplines and other related disciplines and fields of scholarly study to build a framework for social studies curriculum design. The ten themes thus present a holistic framework for state and local curriculum standards. To further enhance the curriculum design, social studies educators are encouraged to seek detailed content from standards developed for history, geography, civics, economics, and other fields.

## II. TEN THEMATIC STRANDS IN SOCIAL STUDIES

**I Culture.** The study of culture prepares students to answer questions such as: What are the common characteristics of different cultures? How do belief systems, such as religion or political ideals, influence other parts of the culture? How does the culture change to accommodate different ideas and beliefs? What does language tell us about the culture? In schools, this theme typically appears in units and courses dealing with geography, history, sociology, and anthropology, as well as multicultural topics across the curriculum.

**II Time, Continuity, and Change.** Human beings seek to understand their historical roots and to locate themselves in time. Knowing how to read and reconstruct the past allows one to develop a historical perspective and to answer questions such as: Who am I? What happened in the past? How am I connected to those in the past? How has the world changed and how might it change in the future? Why does our personal sense of relatedness to the past change? This theme typically appears in courses in history and others that draw upon historical knowledge and habits.

**III People, Places, and Environments.** The study of people, places, and human-environment interactions assists students as they create their spatial views and geographic perspectives of the world beyond their personal locations. Students need the knowledge, skills, and understanding to answer questions such as: Where are things located? Why are they located where they are? What do we mean by “region”? How do landforms change? What implications do these changes have for people? In schools, this theme typically appears in units and courses dealing with area studies and geography.

**IV Individual Development and Identity.** Personal identity is shaped by one’s culture, by groups, and by institutional influences. Students should consider such questions as: How do people learn? Why do people behave as they do? What influences how people learn, perceive, and grow? How do people meet their basic needs in a variety of contexts? How do individuals develop from youth to adulthood? In schools, this theme typically appears in units and courses dealing with psychology and anthropology.

**V Individuals, Groups, and Institutions.** Institutions such as schools, churches, families, government agencies, and the courts play an integral role in people’s lives. It is important that students learn how institutions are formed, what controls and influences them, how they influence individuals and culture, and how they are maintained or changed. Students may address questions such as: What is the role of institutions in this and other societies? How am I influenced by institutions? How do institutions change? What is my role in institutional change? In schools this theme typically appears in units and courses dealing with sociology, anthropology, psychology, political science, and history.

**VI Power, Authority, and Governance.** Understanding the historical development of structures of power, authority, and governance and their evolving functions in contemporary U.S. society and other parts of the world is essential for developing civic competence. In exploring this theme, students confront questions such as: What is power? What forms does it take? Who holds it? How is it gained, used, and justified? What is

legitimate authority? How are governments created, structured, maintained, and changed? How can individual rights be protected within the context of majority rule? In schools, this theme typically appears in units and courses dealing with government, politics, political science, history, law, and other social sciences.

**VII Production, Distribution, and Consumption.** Because people have wants that often exceed the resources available to them, a variety of ways have evolved to answer such questions as: What is to be produced? How is production to be organized? How are goods and services to be distributed? What is the most effective allocation of the factors of production (land, labor, capital, and management)? In schools, this theme typically appears in units and courses dealing with economic concepts and issues.

**VIII Science, Technology, and Society.** Modern life as we know it would be impossible without technology and the science that supports it. But technology brings with it many questions: Is new technology always better than old? What can we learn from the past about how new technologies result in broader social change, some of which is unanticipated? How can we cope with the ever-increasing pace of change? How can we manage technology so that the greatest number of people benefit from it? How can we preserve our fundamental values and beliefs in the midst of technological change? This theme draws upon the natural and physical sciences, social sciences, and the humanities, and appears in a variety of social studies courses, including history, geography, economics, civics, and government.

**IX Global Connections.** The realities of global interdependence require understanding the increasingly important and diverse global connections among world societies and the frequent tension between national interests and global priorities. Students will need to be able to address such international issues as health care, the environment, human rights, economic competition and interdependence, age-old ethnic enmities, and political and military alliances. This theme typically appears in units or courses dealing with geography, culture, and economics, but may also draw upon the natural and physical sciences and the humanities.

**X Civic Ideals and Practices.** An understanding of civic ideals and practices of citizenship is critical to full participation in society and is a central purpose of the social studies. Students confront such questions as: What is civic participation and how can I be involved? How has the meaning of citizenship evolved? What is the balance between rights and responsibilities? What is the role of the citizen in the community and the nation, and as a member of the world community? How can I make a positive difference? In schools, this theme typically appears in units or courses dealing with history, political science, cultural anthropology, and fields such as global studies, law-related education, and the humanities.

### III. STANDARDS INTO PRACTICE: EXAMPLES FOR THE EARLY GRADES

#### Early Grades

#### **I** Culture

Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of *culture and cultural diversity*, so that the learner can:

#### Performance Expectations

- a. explore and describe similarities and differences in the ways groups, societies, and cultures address similar human needs and concerns;
- b. give examples of how experiences may be interpreted differently by people from diverse cultural perspectives and frames of reference;
- c. describe ways in which language, stories, folktales, music, and artistic creations serve as expressions of culture and influence behavior of people living in a particular culture;
- d. compare ways in which people from different cultures think about and deal with their physical environment and social conditions;
- e. give examples and describe the importance of cultural unity and diversity within and across groups.

#### Related Themes

**II III V**

**II III IV V IX**

**II III V IX**

**II III V**

**II III V IX**

#### FOCUS ON THE CLASSROOM: STANDARDS INTO PRACTICE

Performance Expectations: a,b,d

Carlene Jackson is an active member of her state's Geographic Alliance and enjoys participating in its institute's and staff development activities. This year she has worked with several primary teachers in her district to revise and improve the elementary social studies program. An ongoing concern of the intermediate teachers is the failure of students in the early grades to develop geography understanding. Jackson has volunteered to pilot the new program in her first grade class.

Before the first day of school, Jackson looks over her class list, inferring from the children's surnames that she will have students of Mexican, Vietnamese, and Korean ancestry. She also knows that, because of the general population of the school, she will have students of African-American and European-American backgrounds. This rich mix of cultural backgrounds provides Jackson with many opportunities to expose her students to experiences that increase their geographic knowledge and skills and their cultural understanding.

By the end of the first month of school, Jackson and her first graders decide to study and compare how families meet their basic needs of food, clothing, and shelter in their community, with how families meet their needs in Juarez, Mexico; Hanoi, Vietnam; Lagos, Nigeria; and Frankfurt, Germany. To do this, Jackson and the students create the following chart:

### How Families Meet Basic Needs

Needs	Our City	Juarez	Hanoi	Lagos	Frankfurt
<i>food</i>					
<i>shelter</i>					
<i>clothing</i>					

Throughout the unit, Jackson and her students read books and stories, look at photos and slides, watch videos, and talk to speakers from their designated cities. The students sharpen their skills in reading, writing, and speaking, in addition to learning new geography skills such as basic map reading. For each city, they read and discuss something about its location, climate, region, and people.

By the end of the unit, Jackson's students can discuss how people in at least five different places meet their basic needs. Through students' discussion and formal writing, Jackson assesses the quality of student learning by determining if they are now more knowledgeable about how cultures meet similar needs, the ways in which societal needs are influenced by geographic characteristics, and the role of economic forces in determining how wants and needs are met.

## II Time, Continuity, & Change

Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of *the ways human beings view themselves in and over time*, so that the learner can:

### Performance Expectations

- demonstrate an understanding that different people may describe the same event or situation in diverse ways, citing reasons for the differences in views;
- demonstrate an ability to use correctly vocabulary associated with time such as past, present, future, and long ago; read and construct simple timelines; identify examples of change; and recognize examples of cause and effect relationships;
- compare and contrast different stories or accounts about past events, people, places, or situations, identifying how they contribute to our understanding of the past;
- identify and use various sources for reconstructing the past, such as documents, letters, diaries, maps, textbooks, photos, and others;
- demonstrate an understanding that people in different times and places view the world differently;
- use knowledge of facts and concepts drawn from history, along with elements of historical inquiry, to inform decision-making about, and action-taking on public issues.

### Related Themes

I III IV V

I III V VIII

I III X

I III

I III IX

I III V VI VII  
VIII IX X

### FOCUS ON THE CLASSROOM: STANDARDS INTO PRACTICE

Performance Expectations: b, c, d

Luis Santos' fourth grade students are studying the Northeast region of the United States. As part of this study, the students are identifying people involved in major events associated with the Revolutionary War. Santos divides the class into six groups. He assigns each group of students a specific person (e.g., George III, Sam Frances, Elizabeth Freeman, Patrick Henry, Mercy Otis Warren, and George Washington) and asks them to develop scenes that highlight their character's contributions before, during, or after the Revolutionary War. He asks the students to establish the setting and a situation in which their character is taking the lead. Students use a variety of resource materials to assist in developing the setting and dialogue for their character and others involved in their scene.

After students develop their scenes, Santos asks them to determine the correct chronological order of the scenes and then to perform their scenes for their classmates. When all scenes have been performed, the class decides whether any additional narrator text is necessary to explain how the scenes are linked, in order to present the clearest and most accurate view of how the presentation content relates to the major events of the Revolutionary War period.

To evaluate the quality of the student performances, Santos and the students discuss these questions: Were the scenes portrayed in correct chronological order? Did each scene illustrate something important to the story? Did the scenes fit together so they told the story well? Was anything important left out? Were causes and effects clearly and accurately shown?



### III People, Places, & Environments

Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of *people, places, and environments*, so that the learner can:

#### Performance Expectations

- construct and use mental maps of locales, regions, and the world that demonstrate understanding of relative location, direction, size, and shape;
- interpret, use, and distinguish various representations of the earth, such as maps, globes, and photographs;
- use appropriate resources, data sources, and geographic tools such as atlases, data bases, grid systems, charts, graphs, and maps to generate, manipulate, and interpret information;
- estimate distance and calculate scale;
- locate and distinguish among varying landforms and geographic features, such as mountains, plateaus, islands, and oceans;
- describe and speculate about physical system changes, such as seasons, climate and weather, and the water cycle;
- describe how people create places that reflect ideas, personality, culture, and wants and needs as they design homes, playgrounds, classrooms, and the like;
- examine the interaction of human beings and their physical environment, the use of land, building of cities, and ecosystem changes in selected locales and regions;
- explore ways that the earth's physical features have changed over time in the local region and beyond and how these changes may be connected to one another;
- observe and speculate about social and economic effects of environmental changes and crises resulting from phenomena such as floods, storms, and drought;
- consider existing uses and propose and evaluate alternative uses of resources and land in home, school, community, the region, and beyond.

#### Related Themes

IX

I

IX

VIII IX

I IV V

VI VIII

II IX

I V VII

V VII VIII IX X



## FOCUS ON THE CLASSROOM: STANDARDS INTO PRACTICE

### Performance Expectations: a, b, c, d

As part of learning about their community, Ginny Adams' six- and seven-year-old students are working on developing mental maps of their city, including locations of major features and services. The Bureau of Tourism has provided colorful pictorial maps which students use to "explore" the city area by area. In addition, two parents of class members have created a large plastic floor outline map which contains only information necessary for orientation.

Each day, the children work with Adams in using the city maps. They discuss new areas of the city, reading the map to determine what features and services are found there. Children who have been to the area describe what they've seen.

After getting this overview of their city, the children cluster in small groups, and each group selects a different area for a study project. Working in groups, they create pop-up maps of their area and locate them accurately on the floor map. One group creates its pop-up of the zoo area. Another creates its pop-up of the community park, which includes the new pool complex. Yet another group creates representations of the downtown library and monuments.

To evaluate the accuracy of students' mental maps of the city, each student independently draws an outline map of the metropolitan area. On this outline, they draw major streets and landmarks and mark where their special pop-up area is located. Adams assesses the students' work for accuracy of the location of the pop-ups and the quality of presentation.