



2011 Minnesota Academic Standards in Social Studies K-12

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

February 21, 2012

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

The state standards, known as the *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 course credits and high school graduation. The standards and benchmarks for a particular grade level (or grade band in high school) describe the social studies content that is to be mastered by all students by the end of that grade level or band.

The standards and benchmarks also guide school districts in designing K-12 social studies curricula. The standards are placed at the grade level where mastery is expected with recognition that a progression of learning experiences in earlier grades builds the foundation for mastery later on. Teachers should keep in mind that, in many cases, content should be introduced earlier than it appears in the standards and benchmarks in order to provide students sufficient time for mastery.

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

Students must complete the following course credit requirements:

- Three and one-half (3.5) credits of social studies, encompassing at least United States history, geography, government and citizenship, world history, and economics; or,
- Three (3.0) credits of social studies encompassing at least United States history, geography, government and citizenship, and world history, and one-half (.5) credit of economics taught in a school’s social studies, agriculture education, or business department (Minn. Stat. § 120B.024 (a)(4)).

In addition to the course credit requirements, students must satisfactorily complete all standards (and achieve the benchmarks that supplement the standards) (Minn. Stat. § 120B.02 (c), 120B.023, subd. 1 (a)).

3. Why were the 2004 social studies standards revised?

The state academic standards must be reviewed and revised according to the schedule set forth in Minnesota Statutes, section 120B.023, subd.2. The 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 new 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.

4. How were Minnesota’s social studies standards developed?

In December 2010, MDE solicited applications from the public for the standards committee. In January 2011, the commissioner formed 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. Most of the teachers had expertise teaching two or more disciplines or grade levels, Advanced Placement or honors courses, and students with special needs.

The proposed 2011 standards are the result of an intensive year-long 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 (February 21, 2012) is now proceeding through the state’s formal administrative rulemaking process.

5. 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 national documents and reports on social studies education, exemplary standards from other states, more than 1100 comments submitted by the public, analysis submitted by an unprecedented number of expert reviewers of the draft standards, and advice provided by numerous content and pedagogy experts.



6. What new mandates and requirements were considered in the revision of the social studies standards?

The social studies standards were revised to reflect:

- Grade-**specific** benchmarks in grades K-8.
- College and Career Readiness.
- **Contributions** of Minnesota’s American Indian tribes and communities.
- Technology **and** Information Literacy.
- Financial Literacy (personal finance).
- **Geographic** Information Systems.

7. When must the 2011 standards be implemented?

The 2011 standards, if promulgated into rule, must be implemented by schools no later than the 2013-2014 school year (Minn. Stat. § 120B.023). Until that time, the 2004 standards are in effect.

8. Where can I find the 2011 standards?

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

9. How do the 2010 social studies standards differ from the 2004 standards?

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

- Fewer standards and benchmarks overall.
- 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).
- Better integration of all of the social studies disciplines at a given grade level, K-8.
- Greater balance in the number of standards and benchmarks from each of the social studies disciplines at each grade level. K-8.
- A benchmark “grain size” that allows for a variety of curriculum approaches.
- More consistency among benchmarks in terms of “grain size.”
- Fewer examples for each benchmark, and examples included for benchmarks only where needed.
- Smoother progression of knowledge and skills from grade to grade.
- Added focus on geotechnologies in geography, and personal finance in economics.
- Focus on citizenship, college- and career-readiness and concepts and skills that prepare students for life in a more globally connected world.

The 2011 standards document also includes an overview of the K-12 standards in each discipline, a K-12 Sequence of Study graphic, and a list of the substrands (categories of standards) and anchor standards for each of the four social studies disciplines.

10. Why do the revised standards have grade-specific benchmarks?

Minnesota Statutes, section 120B.023, subd. 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 (Minn. Stat. § 120B.023, subd. 1). High school benchmarks may cover more than one grade.

11. 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 later on.

12. Must students complete both the standards and benchmarks?

Yes, students must complete all standards and all benchmarks. The 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 standards are grounded or “anchored” in college and career readiness. Because they represent the “big picture,” they are repeated at multiple grade levels.

Each anchor standard is comprised of one or more grade-level *benchmarks*. The benchmarks are written as learning outcomes—the specific “knowledge and skills that schools must offer and students must achieve to satisfactorily complete a state standard” (Minn. Stat. § 120B.023, subd. 1). **Benchmarks 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).** The benchmarks for each anchor standard represent a progression of learning that spans several grades.

13. Are examples optional?

Yes. Unlike the standards and benchmarks (which are required by state statute), the examples are provided only 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:...*”.

14. Do the revised standards overlap with the English Language Arts Literacy in History/ Social Studies standards?

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

15. 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 standard: *The meaning, use, distribution and importance of resources changes over time*.
- The 1 refers to the first benchmark for that standard: *Explain how geographic factors affected land use in the North American colonies*.

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.

Figure 6: Sample Benchmark

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.

16. When will the standards be revised again?

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