

**Putting Ideological Agendas Ahead of Teaching the Truth:  
Proposed Social Studies Standards Under Consideration for Final Adoption by the  
Texas State Board of Education**

The proposed standards for social studies (Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills, or TEKS) that the State Board of Education is considering for final approval put ideological agendas ahead of facts and sound scholarship. Rather than simply teach students the truth about our history and society, the state board appears determined to distort the past to align with members' ideological and political views. This risks undermining the education of millions of Texas kids, making it harder for them to compete with students educated in other states.

- **The proposed standards cultivate ignorance about much of the world outside “Western civilization.”**
  - The current draft focuses overwhelmingly on what is called “Western civilization” (primarily the Americas, Europe and Christianity), with limited coverage – especially in Grades K-8 – of the wider world.
  - This narrow focus on “Western civilization” is radically different from the current standards and how other states teach social studies. It will leave Texas students ignorant about the different peoples, cultures and perspectives in our interconnected world.
  
- **The proposed standards overwhelmingly privilege Christianity and leave students largely ignorant about the world’s other major religions.**
  - The proposed standards in multiple grades and courses require students to learn about the Bible and Christian teachings. But with limited exceptions students learn next to nothing about other major world religions.
  - The state board in April stripped out a requirement that students in high school world history learn about the “significant beliefs” of major non-Christian religions (other than Buddhism, oddly). Students would simply be required to learn that those beliefs are laid out in various religious texts. Failing to teach students the basic beliefs of major world religions would be a departure from the current standards in Texas and as well as in other states.
  - The only course in which students would be required to learn about the basic beliefs of nearly all of the other major religions is high school world geography, which is not a required course that all students take. In fact, the new social studies framework also eliminates the longtime course in world geography and cultures in Grade 6.
  - The standards single out Christianity as the source for values that are also common in other religions, such as compassion, equality, and respect for others.
  - When speaking to the Republican-controlled State Board of Education in April, the chairman of the Republican Party of Texas declared that non-Christians should teach their “woke ideologies at their homes.”
  
- **The drafts present a Sunday school version of social studies, treating the Bible as a history book and directing students to make connections with its passages.**

**Examples:**

- Starting in the earliest elementary grades and even through high school economics, the drafts have public school students learn about Bible stories – like Exodus and the Ten Commandments – and make other connections with the Bible.
  - The proposed standards portray biblical figures like Moses and Abraham as actual historical figures even though views on this vary among biblical scholars and historians. This is another example of the standards presenting faith claims as facts accepted by all.
- **The proposed standards oversimplify and distort the role of religion in American history. Examples:**
- The standards portray the Pilgrims and Puritans as coming to the colonies in search of religious freedom, ignoring that they persecuted those who didn't share their beliefs in the colonies they established. Failing to teach students this truth obscures the remarkable story of how and why the nation's Founders protected religious freedom by barring government from favoring or disfavoring any particular religion.
  - The high school U.S. History standards credit "the belief in Providence" as one of the reasons for the American victory in the Revolution. This is a faith claim presented as history. In fact, supporters and colonial loyalists both claimed the support of God.
  - The proposed standards require students to learn that abolitionists like Harriet Tubman were inspired by their faith to oppose slavery and defend the dignity and worth of every person. But students learn nothing about how many – especially in the South – used the Bible to justify slavery and, later, segregation. This is a missed opportunity to help students learn how religion has inspired people to do great things while others can use it to justify injustice and cruelty.
- **The proposed standards appear to purposefully cultivate hostility toward Muslims.**
- The state board has seemed to go out of its way to promote animus toward Islam in the proposed standards. For example, the board in April removed standards addressing cultural, scientific and other contributions of the Islamic world in Europe and elsewhere. The standards instead focus on violence and conflict between Christians and Muslims, distortions about jihad, and the misleadingly labeled "Islamic slave trade" (but not the "Christian slave trade").
  - This perception has been reinforced by vicious verbal attacks on Islam and Muslim Texans by some state board members who have openly insulted the religion and its adherents in public meetings.
- **The proposed standards often appear more focused on promoting an ideological point of view than in teaching the truth. Examples:**
- The standards for the 7th-grade course suggest to students that the desire by 20th-century progressives for a more active role for government in the economy conflicted with the views of the nation's Founders. But in reality, the Founders were sharply divided on the role of government in the economy and other matters. This has been an ongoing debate throughout our nation's history.
  - The 8th-grade course on Texas history portrays labor organizers as responsible for "mob violence" while portraying opposition from business owners – who deployed

strikebreakers and state militia against strikers – as simply principled support for “free enterprise.”

- **The proposed standards whitewash the Confederate cause in the Civil War.**
  - While the proposed standards do highlight slavery, they continue to echo the discredited “Lost Cause” myth that the Civil War was fought in part over “states’ rights.” In fact, the Confederate states – including Texas – made clear in their secession declarations that they sought to defend the right to enslave human beings because of their race.

## **HOW WE GOT HERE**

- The State Board of Education last year approved a radically new framework for teaching social studies that focuses instruction in kindergarten through Grade 8 on “Western civilization.” Educators and scholars warned that this new framework was pedagogically unsound.
- The board appointed a panel of “content advisors” to guide the drafting of the new standards. These political appointees include the head of a prominent Christian advocacy group, WallBuilders, as well as an assortment of conservative political activists. Just one content advisor is a K-12 classroom educator. Even so, the content advisors produced an extremely detailed outline for each grade level and course that essentially served as a first draft of the new standards.
- Educators warned that the outline/draft was far too detailed for classrooms and included requirements that were not age-appropriate for each grade level. But the Texas Education Agency and the state board restricted the ability of work groups made up of educators and other Texans to make substantial changes to that initial outline/draft.
- After the work groups submitted the official draft of the new standards this spring, state board members in April (First Reading) made major changes through dozens of amendments. The current version of the proposed standards reflects those changes.
- The board is set to make further amendments and vote on final approval of the proposed standards at its meeting June 22-26.