

A Brief History of Social Studies Education

Formalizing Education in the U.S.

With the end of the American Revolution, Benjamin Franklin and other Founding Fathers advocate for an education system that will develop moral, informed and patriotic citizens.

1783

A Grammatical Institute of the English Language

Noah Webster's book is the first to include history as a subject separate from reading, geography and the classics.



Report for the VA General Assembly

During the founding of the University of Virginia, Thomas Jefferson stresses the importance of history and geography in primary education.



1818

Social Education in Great Britain

The precursor to social studies, social education is founded in Great Britain as a way to promote social welfare.



1820's

The Study of History in Schools

The report by the Committee of Seven defines a national U.S. history curriculum for high school.



1898

American Political Science Association and American Sociology Association

Social scientists form these organizations to further their disciplines and create independence from historians.



1900's

Report on Social Studies

The National Education Association's report standardizes the term "social studies" and calls for an interdisciplinary and modern approach to the field.



1916

National Council for Social Studies

The NCSS is created to unite and offer support to social studies educators.



1921

Man and His Changing Society

Harold Rugg's series of textbooks connects topics to social problems and encourages students to explore potential solutions. It is later criticized as un-American and widely censored.



1929

Cold War Fears

Progressive education and social studies are condemned as communist by historians such as Arthur Bestor.



Late 40's - early 50's

Late 50's - early 70's

New Social Studies Movement

This curriculum reform movement fueled by government funding aims to challenge propaganda in social studies and establish an academic standard in teaching based on scientific inquiry.



Man: A Course of Study

This spiral curriculum distributed by the National Science Foundation is scrutinized for promoting un-American ideas, and contributes to distrust of government-funded educational projects.



1965

History Revival

The conservative Bradley Commission finds history education in the U.S. inadequate, and makes specific recommendations regarding both American and world history.



1980's

A Nation at Risk

A national commission's report asserts that U.S. schools are failing to educate students, proposes reforms, and calls for more rigorous standards.



1983

Indian Education for All Act

This Montana law aims to implement a 1972 requirement that schools recognize and preserve the unique cultural heritage of American Indians; funding isn't allocated until 2005.



1994

National Standards for History

The controversial set of curriculum guidelines is charged with being too politically correct by conservatives.



1999

No Child Left Behind

Congress passes this law with bipartisan support. Within five years, a survey of 491 districts finds that 36% of elementary schools have decreased time spent on social studies instruction.



2001

African American History

Philadelphia becomes the first school district requiring a class in African American history for high school graduation.



2005

Common Core State Standards

While this initiative does not include social studies content standards, it does specify social studies literacy standards.



2010

Graduation Requirements

In 2012, only two states require students to pass a civics test to graduate from high school. By 2018, that number grows to 19.



2012 - 2018

C3 Framework

Over 20 states and 15 national organizations collaborate on a framework for upgrading social studies standards, driving interdisciplinary instruction.



2013

LGBTQIA History

Joining California, Colorado, New Jersey and Oregon, Illinois becomes the fifth state to require that schools teach about the contributions of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people.



2020

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