

Best Practices in K-12 Social Sciences *Written by and
for K-12 Social Sciences teachers in the Beaverton
School District*

1.Purpose: The purpose of Social Sciences education is not simply to study the world, but to *change* it. We believe that the Social Sciences play a central role in preparing students for empowered civic engagement and responsible participation within and across their local, national, and global communities.¹²

Standards

- a. Content and context rich expectations: Oregon’s 2021 Social Science Standards Integrated with Ethnic Studies¹³ engage students in the domains of Civics and Government, Geography, Historical Knowledge and Historical Thinking, Economics and Financial Literacy, Social Science Analysis, and Multicultural and Ethnic Studies. These standards ground student learning expectations and learning targets.

Learning Targets and Teaching Points:

- a. K-12 academic learning targets (ALTs) are based on the real-world relevance and work of social scientists, which includes 1) building knowledge, 2) critical thinking, 3) research, and 4) communication skills.
 - i. The grade-level academic supporting targets (ASTs) are derived directly from the 2021 Oregon Social Science Standards Integrated with Ethnic Studies.
- b. A standards-based learning and assessment model provides students with clear and objective learning targets, which takes the mystery out of assessment for students. Through learning targets:
 - i. Students are able to:
 1. See learning targets posted that are relevant to the unit/lesson.
 2. Explain the meaning of the learning target and how it connects to the learning.
 3. Experience a consistent set of expectations within a course and see the progression to subsequent classes where applicable.
 - ii. Teachers are able to:
 1. Create lessons that are aligned to learning targets.
 2. Communicate the learning target both verbally and visually to students.
 3. Use instructional materials and tasks that align with the learning targets.¹⁴

2- Classroom Environment and Culture: Social Science classrooms should be welcoming and inclusive for students and staff of *all* backgrounds, cultures and abilities. Different and multiple perspectives and voices are welcomed, heard, discussed and deliberated upon to ensure a classroom culture that is adaptable and dynamic. Further, a culturally responsive classroom environment and culture is one ripe with care, inclusivity, mutual trust and respect, affirmation and validation of students’ diverse cultural backgrounds as strengths, and teacher and student learning partnerships.

Use of Physical Environment

- b. Physical arrangement of the room communicates to students that both student collaboration and developing independence and self-reflection is valued (e.g., intentional meeting areas, available resources, varied student seating, physical accessibility, etc.).
 - i. Accessibility: The classroom is physically accessible and responsive to students with disabilities and includes appropriate equipment and materials to increase students' comfort and opportunities to be successful.
 - ii. The physical environment can also include local community spaces and opportunities outside of school buildings, including but not limited to field trips, community events, community speakers, experiential learning, etc.
- c. Visual/Instructional materials (i.e., libraries, maps, posters, etc.) feature the histories, contributions, resilience and resistance, and perspectives of many racial, ethnic, and social groups - past and present - with an intentional inclusion of historically marginalized and historically excluded groups.

Classroom Routines and Rituals

- a. Student agency, ownership, and community: Classroom routines and rituals foster student ownership, independence, participation, responsibility, and they reflect the values of community and shared accountability for learning.

Classroom Culture

- a. Inclusivity: The classroom is an inclusive environment in which students identify themselves as valuable members and use their lived experiences and academic, social, linguistic, and emotional strengths in the classroom, school, and community.
- b. Valuing diversity and knowledge: Classroom culture values individual and cultural diversity, students' prior knowledge and lived experiences, and students' heritage languages as strengths that are used to further develop their academic, social, emotional, cultural, and linguistic capabilities.
 - i. The classroom culture fosters the exchange of constructive feedback and the celebration of growth.
- c. Relationships: Educator builds meaningful relationships with students and families to better understand and empathize with different cultural funds of knowledge and lifeways.
 - i. Additionally, developing and nurturing meaningful relationships between the teacher and students, and student to student relationships, acknowledges that students are a key component in the creation and growth of a healthy classroom culture.
- d. Classroom discourse and interactions reveal what is valued in the learning environment: student identity development and belonging, the development of skills and content knowledge, respect for thinking and intellectualism, a lens of criticality and anti-bias/antiracism, as well as joy in the celebration of learning, growth, action, and change.
 - i. Educators should consistently model curiosity, humility, and what it means to be an active and growing inquirer and lifelong learner. This helps students to develop a level

- of comfort and safety in order for them to truly learn, share, and grow themselves
- ii. Additionally, classroom discourse will inevitably lead to disagreement over ideas. These are opportunities for students to learn how to respectfully listen, consider, and debate. Social Sciences discussions should honor all viewpoints to the extent that they do not promote hate or bias, racism, objectification or exploitation, or discrimination.

3-Curriculum and Pedagogy: Students are engaged through meaningful, culturally relevant, and inclusive curriculum and pedagogy that builds knowledge, critical thinking, research, and communication skills. The curriculum provides opportunities for teachers to tailor and create rigorous and responsive instruction with respect to individual students' academic, developmental, social, emotional, cultural, and linguistic capabilities.

Curriculum

- a. Multiple perspectives with the intentional inclusion of historically marginalized and historically excluded groups: Exploring historical and current events from multiple and diverse racial, ethnic, and social perspectives helps students gain a deeper and more complex understanding of the larger human experience.
- b. Transdisciplinary, transferable skills: Curriculum includes purposeful opportunities to build transdisciplinary, transferable skills including knowledge-building (factual, conceptual, and debatable knowledge), critical thinking (including problem solving and criticality), research (inquiry and investigation), and communication (reading, writing, speaking, listening).
- c. Critical literacies: Curriculum invites sustained student engagement through reading, writing, speaking, listening, discussion, debate, and deliberation that fosters critical thinking and the ongoing analysis and evaluation of information and sources.
- d. Accessibility: The curriculum is available and accessible to all students, including students receiving special education services, dual-language and multilingual students, and students who are navigating poverty and/or houselessness.
 - i. With respect to special education services, alternative curricular materials for students who are working towards a non-standard diploma are fundamental in creating learning opportunities for all of our students.
 - ii. As a dual language and multilingual school district, curricular materials and resources in multiple languages are an integral part of supporting and celebrating all of the linguistic diversity that students bring to the classroom.

Teaching Approaches & Strategies

- a. Culturally relevant and responsive teaching:¹⁹ Teaching approaches and strategies invite students to learn about the past and present while working to identify and dismantle injustice, and to promote liberty, justice, and equity in their communities and world. This includes:
 - i. Validating students' lived experiences and values
 - ii. Disrupting power dynamics that privilege dominant groups and perspectives
 - iii. Empowering students to connect to experiences beyond their own, to examine their

own perspective and privilege, and to develop a contemporary sociopolitical or critical consciousness of the world around them.

- b. Multiple and diverse learning opportunities: Teacher provides a variety of learning opportunities for students to access the curriculum and expand entry points, while creatively and responsively utilizing instructional materials and resources.
- c. Civic engagement and responsible democratic participation is sought out in day-to-day and long-term learning and objectives by cultivating student voice, interest, inquiry, action, and agency.

Scaffolds and/or Adjustments for Learning

- a. Use of ongoing diagnostic and formative assessment: Teacher conducts ongoing diagnostic and formative assessments so that they (and their students) have a working knowledge of where current student understanding and skill development is in relation to the learning target(s).
 - i. Multiple opportunities for assessment in a variety of modalities and formats should be provided for students within and across the learning targets.
 - ii. Learning opportunities should be accessible to students who are working towards a non-standard diploma.
- b. Student interest and choice will help develop engaging, responsive, and dynamic scaffolds that are adjusted as students participate in meaning-making and increasingly assume ownership and responsibility for their own learning.
- c. Language acquisition: Scaffolds include multiple opportunities and formats for students to build their language skills which include ways that their authentic voice and home language is honored.²⁰ All classrooms should work towards honoring and actualizing BSD's best practices for multilingual learners.

Student Engagement: Meaningful and engaging student learning experiences are designed to promote sustained interest in the Social Sciences (e.g. cultivating interest and value with students, generating student questions, promoting student ownership, etc.). Engagement is strongest when students' community perspective is valued and integrated into the learning, and when student identities and experiences are surfaced, affirmed, and validated in the classroom to provide multiple ways of understanding and experiencing academic content.

Additionally, engagement is strongest when students recognize and analyze historical and contemporary community and societal problems, ask critical questions and develop research investigations, separate evidence-based claims, evidence, and reasoning from opinions, and evaluate the usefulness and degree of reliability of different historical and current sources. Rich learning and engagement involves students working and growing together through both intellectual and emotional engagement, as well as through ethical reflection and civic agency as their learning connects to their local community and beyond.

Intellectual Work

Essential knowledge and skills: Students will engage in developing factual, conceptual, and debatable knowledge, research and inquiry skills, critical and analytical thinking, and communication skills.²² Intellectual work is conducive to participatory civic engagement and responsible participation within and across students' local and global communities.

- e. Bias and perspective: Teachers and students consider the dynamic nature of knowledge and of multiple and varied perspectives while developing critical thinking habits. It is also important to acknowledge personal bias and positionality, and to be respectful and understanding of diverse cultural norms and perspectives.
 - f. Independent and collaborative investigations: Students should have frequent opportunities to investigate subjects in depth and to participate in choosing topics and modes of learning. Classroom learning should include both independent investigation as well as cooperative learning, and learning opportunities should foster student agency, specifically regarding self-advocacy and collective action.
 - g. Authentic audiences: Opportunities to present work that highlights student voice and learning to authentic audiences within and beyond their classroom and school are highly encouraged.
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Engagement Strategies

- a. Culturally Relevant: Culturally relevant teaching asks educators to embrace student background and experience, which includes teachers exploring/identifying their own biases and positionality. It is essential that educators understand the beliefs, practices, ideologies, and experiences that shape our students' worldviews and experiences.
- b. Cooperative and collaborative learning: Social Sciences classrooms are active and dynamic learning spaces filled with rich cooperative and collaborative learning, inquiry, and student collaborative conversations and deliberation.

Discourse & Communication

- a. Inclusive: Social Science classes must be inclusive and affirming places where all students and staff of all backgrounds, cultures, and abilities feel welcomed, valued, challenged, and heard. This is evidenced by rich and varied opportunities for student discourse and communication with high levels of student engagement and participation. Intentionality in regards to diversity, equity, and inclusion are critical components of a functioning democracy.
- b. High Expectations: Classroom discourse and interactions reflect high expectations and beliefs about all students' capabilities - academic, social, emotional, cultural, and linguistic - and create a culture of belonging, equity and accountability for learning. This is evidenced by elevated and engaged learning partnerships and collaborations.
- c. Student-centered: Talk is student centered with a healthy balance of teacher-to-student talk and student-to-student talk. Academic language supports and intentional planning for rigorous academic discourse allows students multiple opportunities to practice talking about and across topics and issues.
 - i. Student-student collaborative conversations are conducive to the real-world relevance and work of social scientists, which includes building knowledge, critical thinking, research, and communication skills.

5. Assessment for Student Learning: The use of varied and frequent standards-based assessments - diagnostic, formative, self, and summative - facilitate and guide student growth within the learning targets and the expectations of the 2021 Oregon Social Sciences Standards Integrated with Ethnic Studies. A multifaceted and responsive approach to standards-based assessment gives students more opportunities to demonstrate what they know.

Assessments

- a. Self-assessment: Students reflect and assess their own learning in relation to the learning target(s) and they reflect and set goals based on teacher and peer feedback.
- b. Multiple opportunities: There are multiple assessment opportunities and the teacher expects all students to demonstrate progress towards their learning goals.
 - i. There is an expectation that all students receive feedback on multiple assessment opportunities to demonstrate their learning.
 - ii. Additionally, evidence of learning may look different from student to student, which addresses the need for equity through diversity in assessment.²³
- c. Varied methods of assessment: Assessment methods include a variety of approaches to gather comprehensive and quality information while leveraging the strengths of different student learning styles and funds of knowledge.
 - i. Assessments should be designed to meet the needs of each student and include a variety of student assessment data (e.g., individual charts, conferring records, portfolios, conferring, rubrics, etc.).
- d. Best practices for multilingual learners:²⁴ Assessment practices should evaluate language and content standards independently, and should provide multiple opportunities for students to demonstrate proficiency through a variety of modalities. Further:
 - i. Consider language, culture, and background factors when analyzing and creating assessments.
 - ii. Utilize students' heritage languages to assess content knowledge when possible and appropriate.

Formative Assessment and Adjustments

- a. Ongoing Feedback and Adjustment: Teachers utilize feedback and ongoing formative assessment to adjust supports and be more responsive to students, to redirect instruction, and to assist with student self-reflection, evaluation, and goal setting.

Alignment to Oregon State Standards

- b. Assessments are aligned to 2021 Oregon Social Science Standards Integrated with Ethnic Studies and BSD Learning Targets. Additionally, assessments are within and across the domains of Civics and Government, Geography, Historical Knowledge and Historical Thinking, Economics and Financial Literacy, and Social Science Analysis.