



## ***2022-2023 Social Studies Program Evaluation***

### ***Introduction***

Within the 2022 updated District Goal Planning Document, specific goals are noted that it is the District's goal to develop a cohesive vision for instruction, supported by a professional development plan, as well as develop and implement training for ongoing diversity, equity, and inclusion. The recently updated social studies standards within the Maine Learning Results will be one tool to help the district meet these goals. The review process, performed during the spring of 2021 and fall of 2022, was designed to evaluate whether the current programming is meeting the needs of our students who, as graduates of Mt. Ararat High School, are expected to meet rigorous social studies standards. The Committee feels this goal requires an effort to coordinate a K-12 guaranteed and viable systemic curriculum. This report will identify a variety of elements of the program in order to facilitate ongoing improvement.

### ***Context***

Social Studies teaches students not “what” to think, but “how” to think. The knowledge, skills, and dispositions gained through the study of social studies allow students to make informed decisions and participate fully in civic life. Engagement with social studies provides students with the opportunity to learn about their world and become active and involved members of local and global communities. We recognize that social studies is an integral part of a comprehensive education preparing learners for college, careers, and civic life. Through the study of each of the four strands of social studies—civics and government, personal finance and economics, geography, and history—students are provided with opportunities to acquire and apply knowledge and skills in various authentic contexts.

The State of Maine Department of Education recently completed a mandatory Social Studies review process. This review recognized the revised standards and supporting materials.

### ***History of Program***

It is important to review information from the 2015-2016 committee review which stated in the late 1990's that a Social Studies Committee was formed to revise social studies units at the middle school, using the concept of basing units around a set of essential questions that students would be expected to explore and be able to answer. Around this same time, a committee was formed which was made up of an administrator and teachers representing grade levels K-12. Before it was disbanded in 2004-2005, the Committee's charge was to align the social studies curriculum with the Maine Learning Results, recommend new materials needed in social studies, and develop units for social studies content. During this time, the Committee explored geography materials. It is referenced in previous curriculum reviews that a decision was made to purchase the National Geographic Map Essential program for grades one through six. This program is not currently in use in our K-6 grade classrooms.

Prior to the new adoption of the 2019 Maine Learning Results, the middle school and high school developed learning goals aligned with the State’s social studies standards. The middle school has worked to realign the learning goals to be updated to reflect changes to the 2019 MLR, specifically personal finance.

At the high school, the Social Studies Department moved to heterogeneous grouping almost two decades ago for most classes. Prior to this shift, the Social Studies Department was heavily tracked at all grade levels. In this environment, teachers observed that students in the lowest tracks were not being exposed to the same level of expectations and learning goals as other students. In order to mitigate this disparity, homogeneous grouping was ended. Over a decade ago, the Social Studies Department initiated another shift in its curriculum and instruction. Using the 21st Century Learning Initiative as a template, teachers evaluated the traditionally taught courses and determined students would benefit from a new focus on “social studies” in order to better prepare them for life as active and informed citizens. The result of this shift moved 9th grade Social Studies away from ancient history and replaced these courses with two semester-length classes—world religions in the fall and world governments in the spring. Similarly, 10th grade replaced European History with a semester of comparative economics in the fall and a course on foreign policy in the spring. U.S. History has remained untouched as the Social Studies offering for all juniors.

## **Program Overview**

### *Elementary Staffing*

At the elementary level, social studies instruction is provided by classroom teachers. These teachers are also responsible for teaching other content. However, this varies at the elementary level across the District, as each school has a slightly different schedule, some allowing for flexible grouping and multi-age classrooms. Social studies content is often embedded in language arts units.

### *Middle School Staffing*

There are currently six full-time social studies teachers at the middle school, two at each grade level, as well as one teacher who teaches two additional social studies classes in eighth grade (this position will not exist following the 22-23 school year). Additionally, our alternative education program has one teacher providing social studies content to a small group of seventh and eighth grade students.

### *High School Staffing*

There are currently eight full-time high school social studies teachers. The eight staff members teach students throughout the 9-12 grade span, with teaching assignments changing each year to meet student needs based on the course requests and grade level sizes. (There was an additional ninth social studies teacher for one year during the 2021-2022 school year to support smaller class sizes during the COVID-19 Pandemic). In addition, there is a Special Education teacher/case manager who teaches Social Studies to students in small classes as well as supports mainstream teachers in regular education classrooms.

## **Time for Social Studies in Schedules**

### *Elementary*

Time for Social Studies instruction varies across grade levels within the District. At some elementary schools, grade-level teams schedule specific content area time (for health, science, and social studies) within their weekly schedule. Others embed social studies instruction into language arts units.

### *Middle School*

Middle school students have one 50 minute class daily in social studies. A small group of special education students (BILD program) do not participate in social studies courses in order to have additional time for reading instruction.

### *High School*

At the high school, students in grades 9-12 are currently required to complete a three-year sequence of courses (Social Studies I, Social Studies II, and Social Studies III). These are typically done in the 9th, 10th, and 11th grades. Additional elective courses exist for students in grade 12.

## **Additional Support for Students**

### *Elementary*

Students with IEPs or 504 Plans are supported in the classroom for content areas or are taken out for 1:1 or small group work, depending on the activity or topic being covered.

### *Middle School*

Special educators do consult with regular education teachers to support students with IEPs. The majority of special education students remain in the classroom during social studies instruction and accommodations are supported.

### *High School*

In high school, students receive extra support for Social Studies-specific needs from a variety of structures. Students with IEPs and 504s receive the benefit of accommodations used by teachers to support their learning. For Special Education students who require more support, they may be placed in a small, specialized classroom taught by a Special Education teacher. The Special Education teacher may also visit and work with teachers and students in mainstream classrooms as needed. Non-Special Education students receive additional support in Academic Support Time (AST) with their regular classroom teachers, but may also stay after school once a week to work with a Social Studies teacher. Additional support can be found in the school's developing RTI program to help students with executive functioning, organization and task initiation, and completion.

## **Gifted and Talented**

As outlined in the District's approved plan for gifted and talented (GT) services, students can be identified as gifted and talented in any academic area, including social studies. Teachers make a referral in the area of social studies by contacting gifted and talented staff and/or completing the Teacher Rating and Observations form.

The District's Identification Committee meets at least annually to review all data on students, to request additional data as needed, and to identify students eligible for gifted and talented services in accordance with gifted and talented identification protocol. Classroom teachers, in consultation with gifted and talented staff, provide for the instructional needs of identified students. Gifted and Talented staff work with students and teachers to identify each child's central strengths, needs, and interests and then provide both guidance and advocacy to connect each child with appropriate opportunities.

Students in grades K-2 are not formally identified for gifted and talented services. The focus at these levels is on identifying needs rather than students. Gifted and Talented staff work collaboratively with teachers to recognize gifted behaviors in the regular classroom. While needs are identified and differentiated for at these levels, students are not.

Grades 3 - 8 classroom teachers provide for the unique learning needs of identified students in consultation with

our gifted and talented staff. With the classroom teacher, gifted and talented staff work with teachers to provide both guidance and advocacy as teachers plan for appropriate learning opportunities

High school students have the opportunity to access courses best suited to their developmental needs and interests. The high school also offers students the opportunity to take AP-level courses in 10th-12th grade (AP Human Geography, AP US History and AP Government). There are a number of student clubs that are focused on civic engagement, advocacy, and citizenship.

## **Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment**

### **Curriculum**

#### *Elementary*

During 2021-2022 there was an effort to coordinate three K-5 units that would guarantee the teaching of at least one consistent unit per trimester across the District. This work coincided with the work of the Social Studies Review Committee. It was determined the best use of our time was to wait until the review was completed so that we could focus our efforts on a K-12 systemic curriculum alignment. During this time, it was very evident there was inconsistency across the five elementary schools. This was confirmed in an October 2022 survey that was distributed to all staff in the District.

#### *Middle School*

The social studies curriculum at the middle school is based on learning targets for the four strands of social studies- geography, history, government and civics and economics. These learning targets are based on the current state Social Studies Standards. Units were developed based on the learning targets for each grade level.

Due to budgetary limitations, much of the curriculum has been developed using a variety of materials, often free or low-cost internet resources. Grade-level colleagues have worked together to develop lessons and units. However while teachers at each grade level use common learning targets, some units and lessons are not always common. In the past, teachers have been given the leeway to develop lessons independently. During the current school year, release time has been given to provide teachers the opportunity to develop more common units aligned to the learning targets across each grade level. It is hoped that we can provide a common experience for all middle school students regardless of their team of teachers. The following sequence of units is covered:

- Sixth Grade: units on geography, an introductory history unit called Thinking like a Historian, and units on ancient civilizations and culture. Short units on economics and government structures complete the year.
- Seventh Grade: units on civic participation, structure, and function of U.S. Government, history of Democracy, regional world geography, content literacy in current events, perspective in historical fiction, fundamentals of macroeconomics, and elements of personal finance
- Eighth Grade: students study history; major turning points in the U.S., Native Americans and Immigrants, Government & Civics, Structures of Government, Civic Responsibility, and the Bill of Rights. Geography focuses on how movement, cooperation, and interaction influence territorial control. Economics learning goals include economic development and functions and roles & processes of the economy.

### *High School*

Until recently, very little changed in the established scope and sequence for almost a decade. Any work on revising courses ended with the pandemic, but for the past year and a half, the Social Studies department at the high school has had bi-weekly meetings and summer sessions to revise and strengthen these courses.

At the 9th grade level, teachers have reorganized the units for world religions and have developed a research project to introduce incoming high school students to how to conduct appropriate and well-supported research as an important skill for students in Social Studies. Work continues at the 9th-grade level to reorient and strengthen the focus for world governments.

In the 10th grade, teachers have added elements of Personal Financial Literacy to the economics curriculum as a result of the revisions to the MLR. In addition, the structure of the units was re-arranged to allow for a more logical progression from micro to macro elements in economics. The course on foreign policy has been given a stronger foundation by having all teachers instruct students on the use of International Relations theory in order to better assess events in the international sphere and to provide possible solutions based on a more solid understanding of the dominant schools of thought in the field. The strong and prolific use of a variety of simulations in both 10th-grade courses has allowed students to better engage in problem-solving which is a key component of the 21st Century Learning Initiative.

Historically, teachers have struggled to get through the curriculum in U.S. History, so for the past year and a half teachers have sought to identify key ideas in U.S. History and developed both essential and guiding questions to help teachers plan more focused units and lessons. The ultimate goal of this work is to create a cohesive, coherent, transparent, well-designed and well-planned educational experience for both teachers and students in all of the required courses in our scope and sequence.

Within grade-level team meetings, Social Studies teachers have begun exploring ways to make meaningful and relevant connections to Maine Native Americans as well as the impending requirements from LD 1664. At the moment, all of this work in grades nine through eleven is ongoing.

Other departmental initiatives at the high school include a move to create a clear progression of skills related to Social Studies, research on pedagogy to improve instruction when dealing with controversial topics, and implementing a new AP course. Members of the Department spent time last spring and summer identifying the skills needed for success in Social Studies. These skills were influenced by both the Maine Learning Results and the Maine Guiding Principles. A draft of this skills tree has been shared with all Social Studies teachers in the high school and the grading categories in Infinite Campus have been changed to reflect these skills for all required courses (except for AP courses which retain their very course-specific skills according to the College Board's educator manuals).

Teachers are developing and sharing lessons on how to develop and assess these skills. Controversy seems inescapable in today's climate; and given the placement of Social Studies in the country's culture wars on education, the Department has sought professional development to strengthen its approach and philosophy on how to address controversial topics. Democracy needs a populace that can discuss, debate, and converse on controversial and important topics without devolving into bitter acrimony. It has been observed that some teachers simply avoid dealing with controversial topics in order to avoid potential fall-out. It is not the role of teachers to project partisan positions on political and/or controversial topics, but it is a disservice to the citizens of this country to not teach and show students how to have conversations about controversial issues. Some elements of the new skills progression promote civil discourse, but the department is looking to explore and expand the use of proven pedagogical methods to help both teachers and students address important issues in

the field of Social Studies. Given the changes in the curriculum where traditional courses in ancient and European history were replaced with courses that the high school believed better developed informed citizens (world religions, comparative governments, economics, and international relations), AP European History was an outlier. Its content only occasionally overlapped the content in economics and international relations, so a review of existing AP courses offered by the College Board showed that the AP Human Geography course was a much closer fit to the concepts found in the academic-level courses. After a year of preparation, students can now take AP Human Geography as sophomores. This course is more popular than AP European History in terms of potential student interest and should create an opportunity for more students to challenge themselves with AP-level work.

## **Instruction**

### *Elementary*

Instruction at the elementary level often occurs during other content area focus. For example, citizenship is covered as rules and procedures are set up for every classroom, and civil expectations are set for classroom culture. Due to restricted time for direct social studies instruction, there is a concerted effort to create cross-curricular experiences. This creates varied guaranteed and viable scope and sequence coverage. It is widely acknowledged that elementary teachers need ongoing professional development and updated resources, especially for Native American Studies.

Most importantly, it is necessary to highlight there is not a consistent curriculum resource provided by the District. This causes individual teachers to seek out material and resources creating issues with equitable learning experiences.

### *Middle School and High School*

Instruction at the high school is intended to help students make progress along the Social Studies skills related to argument, civic participation, collaboration, communication, critical thinking and research. Grade-level progressions for each of these skills were created over the summer of 2022 and are now the grading categories in all academic-level Social Studies courses. Teachers use a wide variety of instructional tools and strategies to engage students in lessons that target these skills (which overlap with the Maine Learning Results, Maine Guiding Principles and the 21st Century Learning Initiative).

## **Assessment**

Because there is no Statewide assessment for social studies, assessments are developed at the classroom level.

### *Elementary*

With the limited time and lack of materials/curriculum at the elementary level, assessment has not been a focus. Social Studies units or topics are neither typically noted on report cards, nor is there a consistent use of scoring student growth and understanding learning goals via Infinite Campus. For the 2021-2022 school year, teachers were encouraged to add comments each trimester informing parents which units or topics were covered.

### *Middle School and High School*

Teachers use a wide variety of assessment tools in high school social studies classes. Formative assessments including, but not limited to, quizzes, self-assessment, observation, questioning, exit tickets, graphic organizers, and learning logs are used by teachers to gauge student depth of understanding of concepts and skills and can help teachers decide what needs to be focused on for classroom instruction. Summative assessments, including chapter/unit tests, exams, research papers, persuasive essays, and oral presentations are used to determine at a particular time what students know and are able to do.

## Additional Opportunities

At the elementary and middle school level, any additional opportunities to exercise citizenship and democratic decision-making occur in students being involved with after-school groups such as Civil Rights Team, or Student Council.

High school students who complete the required department screenings may take Advanced Placement courses in Human Geography, U.S. History, and U.S. Government and Politics. Students interested in taking AP courses that are not offered at Mt. Ararat (Economics, Psychology) may take these courses through *AP4ME*, a program run by the State of Maine and the Maine university system in which students take the courses online. Students can also take a dual enrollment class in U.S. History for which they receive credit through the both University of Southern Maine and Mt. Ararat. At this point, the relationship with USM will end after this year and the high school is looking to establish an academic relationship with Thomas College for dual enrollment. Additionally, students can take college classes and earn college credit for free through the University of Maine's concurrent enrollment, though the subjects vary from session to session.

As current staffing changes, there will be a need for any staff overseeing dual enrollment to pursue teacher credentials for doing dual enrollment instruction.

## Findings and Proposals

- **Finding 1:** K-12 Social Studies integration does not exist causing students to not experience a fully-developed, guaranteed and viable curriculum that provides a robust educational experience across the District. Anecdotal evidence from high school teachers shows that many students come to high school with underdeveloped Social Studies skills and large gaps in common knowledge.
  - **Proposal 1A:** Create a permanent K-12 social studies curriculum team to coordinate a vertically aligned, guaranteed, and viable curriculum
    - Recommend new and updated supporting resources
    - Ensure learning goals are written for K-12 horizontal and vertical alignment
    - Collect and calibrate common assessments at the K-5 level
    - All K-12 teachers consistently use Infinite Campus to report growth and achievement of grade-level or course-specific learning goals
  - **Proposal 1B:** Request the District reserve time in the elementary school's master schedule so there is consistent and sufficient time dedicated to social studies instruction.
- **Finding 2:** Teachers do not have access to updated materials causing many teachers to purchase their own materials. We need to provide quality materials for teachers to use that address the learning goals that are expected at that grade level.
 

**Proposal:** Aligned with Proposal 1A above
- **Finding 3:** Staff development is needed to enhance knowledge of best practices for teaching social studies. This includes controversial topics and Maine Native American Studies.
  - Budget and provide time for professional development to be delivered to all staff teaching social studies.
  - Budget for updated resources to support any adjustments needed to the curriculum to fully integrate Maine Native American Studies.

## Budget Implications:

It is estimated the curriculum committee would be made up of the following personnel:

One teacher for each grade level K-8  
 MTA Social Studies Department Head  
 Grade 9 and Grade 11 teacher  
 One administrator for each grade span level  
 Special Education representative from each grade span level  
 Community member with specific expertise

\$3,000 for teacher compensation  
 \$20,000 for potential curriculum resources  
 \$5,000 professional development

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\$28,000 approximate cost

***Conclusion:***

It is our desire that students in M.S.A.D. No. 75 become critical thinkers and creative contributors to our society. Therefore, our social studies program needs to provide students with opportunities to become active and effective citizens. Our findings show that there is still work to be done to create a cohesive program for our K-12 students. In addition the updated Maine Learning Results is now grade level specific. This is a change from the previous grade span organisation of the MLR and will require a significant amount of realignment. The committee feel this can be approached with excitement and appreciates the opportunity to further work together with additional members. The suggested proposals will guide us in the next steps our district will need to follow to continue to grow our social studies program into the 21st century. The committee appreciates the Board's interest and the opportunity to present our findings.

***2022-2023 Social Studies Program Evaluation Committee Members:***

Lou Dorogi, Mt. Ararat High School, Social Studies Department Head  
 Angie Driscoll, Mt. Ararat High School, Social Studies Teacher  
 Andrea Brown, Mt. Ararat Middle School, 6th Grade Teacher, Social Studies Leader  
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 Deb Jones, Bowdoin Central School, 1st Grade Teacher  
 Dawn San Pedro, Williams-Cone School, 2nd Grade Teacher  
 Meg Marks, Mt. Ararat Middle School Instructional Coach  
 Chris Hoffman, Mt. Ararat High School Principal  
 Chris Lajoie, Bowdoinham Community School Principal  
 Amanda Hersey, Assistant Superintendent