



Key Shifts in 2021 Minnesota Social Studies Standards

[The 2021 K-12 Academic Standards in Social Studies](#) contain important shifts that impact social studies education in Minnesota. These standards used the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) [College, Career, and Civic Life \(C3\) Framework for Social Studies State Standards](#) in the process of revision, in order to align the Minnesota standards with nationwide trends in social studies. They represent a move towards research-based best practices in social studies education, and will prepare Minnesota students with the critical thinking skills necessary for the life in a pluralistic democracy.

#1: Centering of student inquiry

The 2021 K-12 Academic Standards in Social Studies center student inquiry. Using components from the NCSS C3 Framework, students are asked to engage in inquiry practices in each of the five strands. In the 2011 standards, inquiry was a stand-alone standard within the history strand. In the 2021 standards inquiry is embedded throughout all five strands in ways that reflect the unique practices of each discipline. Students are expected to engage consistently in the inquiry process, rather than just be able to recognize and describe it. Inquiry is the means to student development of content knowledge and disciplinary literacy skills.

#2: Shift towards disciplinary literacy skills

The 2021 K-12 Academic Standards in Social Studies ask students to engage in the disciplinary practices of each of the five social studies disciplines in the standards. Disciplinary literacy is the confluence of content knowledge, experiences, and skills merged with the ability to read, write, speak, think critically and perform in a way that is meaningful in the context of a given field. It is distinct from content area literacy skills, which help students comprehend text across subject areas. In implementing the 2021 standards, students will need to engage actively in practices that are authentic to the disciplines of social studies. Memorization of content as a pre-requisite to critical thinking is de-emphasized, as students are provided with increased opportunities to build content knowledge through in-depth inquiry.

#3 Addition of Ethnic Studies as a strand throughout all grade levels

Ethnic studies is the interdisciplinary study of race, ethnicity, and indigeneity with a focus on the experiences and perspectives of people of color within and beyond the United States. Ethnic studies analyzes the ways in which race and racism have been and continue to be social, cultural, and political forces, and the connection of race to the stratification of other groups. The 2021 K-12 Academic Standards in Social Studies adds ethnic studies as a fifth disciplinary strand at each grade level. Integrating ethnic studies honors students' lived

experiences and prepares students to live in diverse communities, cultivating self-determination through the examination of their identities and addressing powerful social, cultural, and political inequities.

The addition of the ethnic studies strand is separate from the requirement of high schools to offer a course in ethnic studies. All students must have the opportunity to learn all standards and benchmarks in the high school grade-band. The ethnic studies anchor standards and benchmarks cannot be taught in an elective course, or a course for credit in a subject area other than social studies.

#4 Change to a fully interdisciplinary model in grades K-8, without lead disciplines

The 2021 K-12 Academic Standards in Social Studies incorporate the five disciplinary strands in a fully interdisciplinary social studies approach in kindergarten through eighth grade. The benchmarks for each grade level across all five disciplines center on a theme, and are meant to be taught in the context of the year’s theme. Themes for each grade level have shifted from the 2011 standards.

2011	2021
Kindergarten-Third—Foundations of Social Studies	Kindergarten-Second—Foundations of Social Studies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kindergarten—Family and community • First Grade—Communities and Culture • Second Grade—People and the Environment
Included in “Foundations of Social Studies”	Third—Ancient World
Fourth Grade—Geography of North America	Fourth Grade—Contemporary World
Fifth Grade—History of North America (up to 1800)	Fifth Grade—Early American Studies
Sixth Grade—Minnesota Studies	Sixth Grade—Minnesota Studies
Seventh Grade—United States Studies	Seventh Grade—United States Studies
Eighth—Global Studies	Eighth—Global Studies