



6–12 Humanities Program Review

English & Social Studies: From Individual Strengths to Programmatic Coherence

Executive Summary

A strong foundation: Dedicated teachers, meaningful learning, disciplinary expertise, and a commitment to equity and inclusion

A central challenge: Varied experience by course, grade level, teacher, and section

Stakeholders consistently value discussion, inquiry, collaboration, projects, critical thinking, writing, and real-world relevance.

The strategic response is coherence—not uniformity.

The history we shared previously...

Background

Social
Studies



Internal Review
2015-2016



Tri-States Visit
2019

English



Tri-States Visit
(Unclear)



Internal Review
2018-2019
Interrupted

The team we assembled:

General Educators

Grades 6-12

English

Courtney Crane
Jennifer Hegland
Doug Levandowski
Emily Lipphardt
Susi Murphy
Jim Sweeney

Social Studies

Katie Dineen
Andrea Hunt
Jonathan Hunt
Stephanie McCann
Rick Miller

Special Educators

Grades 6-12

Patricia Chaballa

ESL Educators

Grades 6-12

Kevin Vega

Librarians

Grades 6-12

Carolyn Bailey

The Components of the Review

- Analysis of student achievement data by the team resulting in categories of the academic program for further study
- Surveys of students, teachers, and parents
- Focus groups with students, teachers, and community partners
- Triangulation of the data by the team
- Initiated ongoing research process
- Use of AI for additional synthesis of the data and refinement of reporting methods

What Stakeholders Are Telling Us

- Students want learning that is engaging, appropriately challenging, clearly structured, and connected to the world. Students identify inconsistent pacing, workload, feedback, directions, and instructional approaches.
- Parents value the excellent teachers and strong Social Studies experiences, while seeking greater consistency in curriculum, grading, workload, rigor, and feedback.
- Board members emphasize the growing importance of original thought, empathy, ethical reasoning, and critical thinking in an AI-driven world.

A Strong Foundation—and a System Challenge

What is working

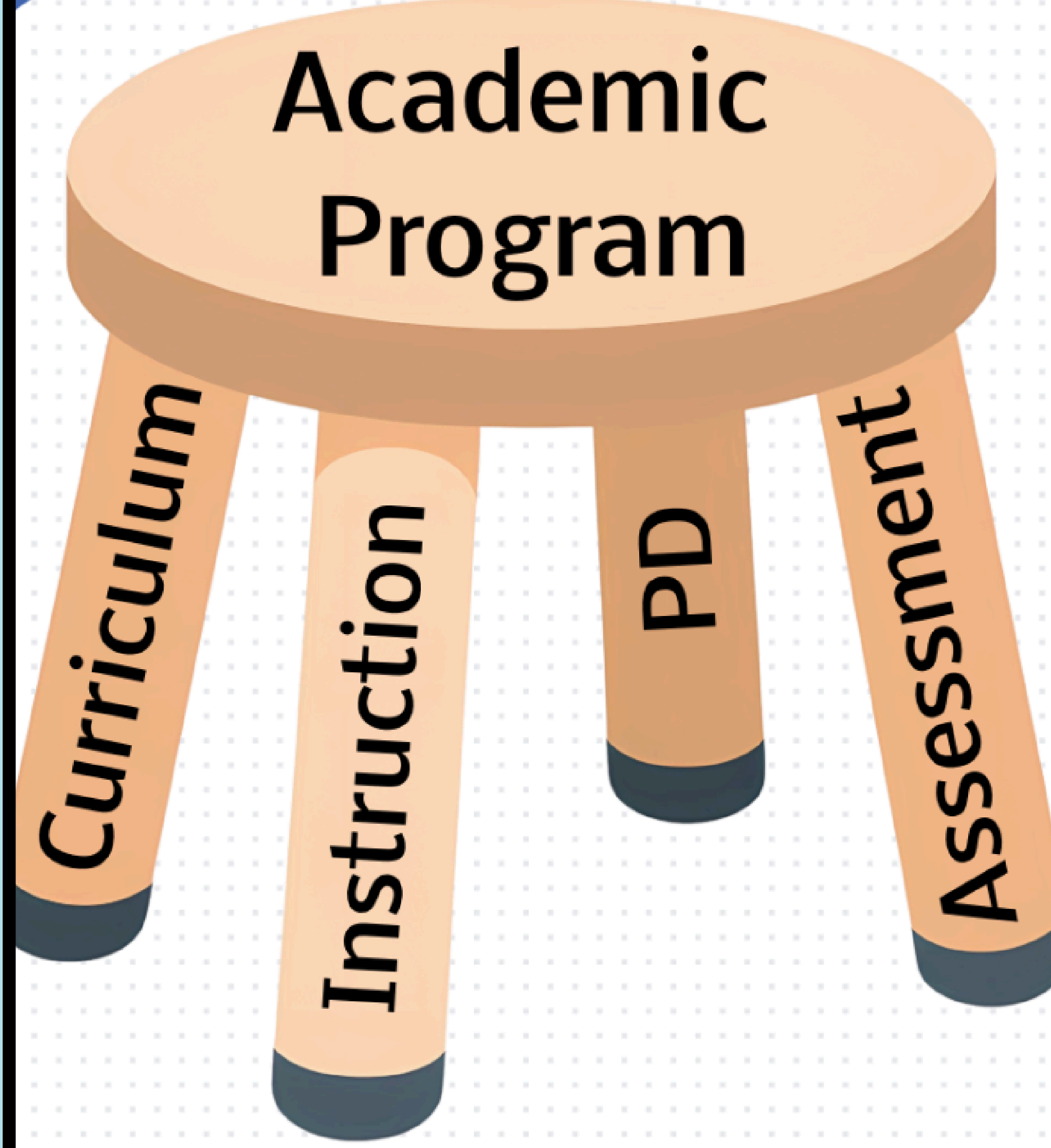
- Exceptional faculty commitment
- Equity, access, and inclusion
- Authentic engagement when students discuss, investigate, create, and apply
- Strong Social Studies satisfaction
- Existing interdisciplinary connections

What needs greater coherence

- 6–12 curriculum and skills progression
- Assessment, grading, and feedback
- Rigor and advanced pathways
- Instructional consistency
- Communication with students and families

The Response to the Challenge

- Improve the academic program by refining:
 - Curriculum
 - Instruction
 - Assessment
 - Professional Development
- Increase communication about the program



English and Social Studies Share Seven Humanities Capacities

1. Reading — closely read complex texts and sources
2. Writing — make claims, use evidence, analyze, organize, and revise
3. Evidence — select, explain, evaluate, and corroborate evidence
4. Inquiry — develop questions, investigate, and construct informed responses
5. Critical Thinking — examine reasoning, assumptions, perspectives, and alternatives
6. Communication — communicate complex ideas purposefully for an audience
7. Understanding of Human Life — examine experiences, systems, choices, and perspectives with curiosity and intellectual humility

Distinct Disciplines

English centers:

- Language, literature, rhetoric, interpretation
- Expression and writing craft
- Authorial choices, voice, style
- Literary argument and close reading
- Identity, culture, and human experience

English asks:

- *What does this text mean?*
- *How does it create meaning?*
- *How does language shape perspective, identity, power, and human experience?*

Social Studies centers:

- History, society, civic life
- Sources and historical thinking
- Historical and civic reasoning
- Historical inquiry and evidence
- Institutions, systems, perspectives, and context

Social Studies asks:

- *What happened?*
- *Why did it happen?*
- *How do we know?*
- *Whose perspectives matter?*
- *How do historical and social systems shape human experience and civic life?*

Distinctive Disciplinary Identities, Shared Humanities Capacities

While the program review creates intentional points of connection, it protects the distinctive disciplinary identity of each department. English and Social Studies develop shared Humanities capacities through different disciplinary lenses, practices, and content.

Humanities Capacity	Shared Student Outcome	English Approach	Social Studies Approach
Reading	<i>I can read a complex text or source closely, identify what matters, and explain how the text/source creates or communicates meaning.</i>	Literary interpretation	Historical/source analysis
Writing	<i>I can make a defensible claim, select relevant evidence, explain how the evidence supports my thinking, organize my ideas effectively, and revise my work.</i>	Rhetorical analysis	Historical/argumentative writing
Evidence	<i>I can select relevant evidence and explain—not merely identify—how it supports, complicates, or changes my thinking.</i>	Close reading and textual evidence	Primary/secondary source evidence
Inquiry	<i>I can develop meaningful questions, investigate them using appropriate texts and sources, and use evidence to construct and communicate an informed response.</i>	Literary argument and inquiry	Historical inquiry
Critical Thinking	<i>I can explain not only what I think, but why I think it, what evidence supports it, what perspectives or assumptions influence it, and what might cause me to reconsider it.</i>	Authorial choices and interpretation	Historical reasoning
Communication	<i>I can communicate complex ideas clearly, purposefully, and appropriately for my audience, using evidence and disciplinary conventions.</i>	Voice and expression	Civic discourse and participation
Understanding Human Life	<i>I can examine human experiences, perspectives, systems, and choices with empathy, curiosity, historical/contextual awareness, and intellectual humility.</i>	Identity, culture, human experience, and literature as a window/mirror	Culture, society, institutions, multiple perspectives, and historical context

A Shared Humanities Vision

English and Social Studies remain distinct disciplines. **Together**, they intentionally develop students who can:

- Read deeply
- Write thoughtfully
- Evaluate evidence
- Inquire authentically
- Think critically
- Communicate effectively
- Understand human experience and civic responsibility



Curriculum: Build Coherence Without Uniformity

Finding

- Variation in curriculum, workload, rigor, and expectations
- Redundancies and gaps across grades/courses
- Students seek both greater choice and stronger challenge
- Social Studies standards revision creates an opportunity for review

Action

- Conduct 6–12 curriculum and skills audits
- Identify essential knowledge and disciplinary skills
- Map reading, writing, research, and inquiry expectations
- Identify redundancies, gaps, advanced pathways, and intersections

Assessment: Consistent Expectations, Not Identical Teaching

Shared Humanities Framework

- Understanding
- Evidence & Analysis
- Reasoning
- Communication

Discipline-specific Criteria

- English: craft, interpretation, rhetoric, style, voice
- Social Studies: sourcing, contextualization, corroboration, historical/civic reasoning
- Common criteria, exemplars, calibration, rubrics, feedback, and revision

Instruction: Make the Best Experiences More Consistent

Students Value:

- Discussion and collaboration
- Inquiry and projects
- Models and exemplars
- Peer review and seminars
- Simulations, research, maps, current events
- Authentic application

Students Critique:

- Repetition
- Lecture-heavy instruction
- Worksheets and packets
- Reading questions without deeper application
- Unclear directions
- Limited feedback or real-world relevance

A Shared Instructional Model

ENGAGE → QUESTION → INVESTIGATE → DISCUSS → CREATE → REFLECT

This is not a prescribed lesson structure but is a common expectation that students regularly encounter meaningful questions, complex texts/sources, investigation, discussion, creation, feedback, and reflection.



Professional Learning: From Events to Collaboration

Shared Priorities

- Student work and common instructional problems
- Peer observation and lesson study
- Assessment calibration
- Interdisciplinary planning
- Literacy and inquiry
- Differentiation and accessibility
- AI and academic integrity

Department Emphasis

- English: UDL, co-teaching, differentiation, reading, vertical articulation
- Social Studies: AI, inclusive pedagogy, primary sources, engagement, peer-led learning
- Both: practical, collaborative, job-embedded learning

Protect and Strengthen Human Intellectual Work

AI is the most significant emerging instructional and assessment challenge identified across both departments. Common Humanities expectations should address:

- **Appropriate AI use and academic integrity**
- **Source evaluation and research**
- **Process-based writing and oral defense**
- **Reflection and original thinking**
- **Responsible technology use**

The goal is not simply detection; it is preserving the thinking, creating, reasoning, and communication students must learn to do.

Communication: Make the Pathway Visible

Students & families are asking:

- What students are learning—and why
- What high-quality work looks like
- How work is assessed
- How feedback is used
- What courses and pathways are available
- How Humanities supports college, career, civic, and lifelong learning

The needed response is...

Consistent, accessible program-of-study communication

Seven Strategic Priorities

1. Create coherent 6–12 curricula and skills progressions.
2. Increase consistency in assessment, grading, feedback, and expectations.
3. Strengthen rigor and advanced opportunities without equating rigor exclusively with AP.
4. Develop collaborative, job-embedded professional learning.
5. Improve communication about curriculum, expectations, assessment, and pathways.
6. Strengthen inquiry and authentic learning.
7. Develop a shared Humanities response to AI.

A Four-Year Implementation Sequence

YEARS 1–2 | COHERENCE — Define capacities; map 6–12 curriculum; establish shared language; identify gaps/redundancies; begin calibration.

YEAR 3 | CONSISTENCY — Develop assessment expectations, exemplars, rubrics, literacy progressions, and feedback/revision practices.

YEAR 4 | INTEGRATION — Develop selected interdisciplinary units, inquiry/capstone opportunities, AI literacy, and cross-grade review of student work.

Establish Coherence → Establish Consistency → Deepen Integration

What Success Should Look Like

- Students encounter clear, ambitious expectations across courses without losing teacher or disciplinary autonomy.
- English and Social Studies remain recognizably distinct while reinforcing shared Humanities capacities.
- Feedback becomes part of learning—not simply the final grade.
- Rigor expands beyond AP to include inquiry, research, writing, seminars, projects, and advanced disciplinary work.
- Students and families understand the pathway and why Humanities learning matters.

The Core Message

The review does not call for wholesale restructuring. It calls for scaling what already works.

Move:

- From isolated excellence to programmatic coherence
- From individual expectations to shared expectations
- From product-focused feedback to feedback as learning
- From AP as the primary marker of rigor to a broader conception of challenge
- From two disciplines alongside one another to two disciplines deliberately developing a shared Humanities skill set

The Opportunity Ahead

English and Social Studies remain distinct disciplines—but together intentionally develop the intellectual capacities every Humanities student needs.



ACTIONS TAKEN IN RESPONSE TO PROGRAM REVIEW CONCLUSIONS

In response to the program review findings and recommendations, the English and Social Studies departments have taken the following actions to strengthen coherence, rigor, relevance, and student experience.



1 Increased English staffing at PMS and revised approach to intervention

- Added English instructional support at PMS to reduce class size and increase targeted instruction. Revised intervention model to provide more timely, data-informed support for students.



2 Revised several courses to strengthen coherence, increase and specify enrichment, and expand opportunities to meet the racial literacy requirement

- Began critical work toward coherence in US I and revised English I and II to support implementation of a coherent sequence of courses with enrichment and racial literacy opportunities.
- Revised Accelerated Sociology and Human Behavior to integrate racial literacy across the units.



3 Revised Pathways courses at PMS

- Refined the sequence of and skills progression in the courses.



4 Began exploring advanced coursework to add to the PHS Program of Studies

- Added AP African American Seminar to the 26–27 elective offerings for Social Studies and began plans to add AP Seminar and Dual Enrollment elective options to the 27–28 English offerings.



5 Expanded current and began seeking additional community partnerships

- Strengthened partnerships with multiple entities (i.e., Morven, Historical Society, Princeton University, Princeton University Art Museum, Princeton Public Library, and Cotsen) and began exploring additional connections to enrich learning and provide authentic experiences.



6 Revisited and deepened the Partnership with the Youth Services Librarians at PPL

- Reestablished regular collaboration between youth services librarians and school librarians to strengthen research skills, information literacy, and resource access for students and staff.



7 Bifurcated the Humanities department to develop content-specific continuous improvement approaches for English and Social Studies

- Planned ongoing curriculum revision and related professional development for each department with intentional integration of priorities – such as writing, inquiry, evidence, and civic understanding – and communication expectations.



These actions reflect our commitment to program coherence, equity, rigor, and meaningful learning experiences that prepare students to think critically, communicate effectively, and engage thoughtfully in the world.

Questions?

