

Social Studies Instruction

Core Beliefs & Instructional Framework

Grades K–8 | 2026–2027

Our Vision: *Social studies instruction at Endeavor Charter School is inquiry-driven, literacy-rich, and student-centered — grounded in evidence-based practice and designed to ensure that all students think critically about the past and present and participate actively as informed citizens.*

OUR PURPOSE

Social studies instruction at ECS is intentionally designed to develop deep historical thinking, strong inquiry and research skills, and civic literacy that students can apply to the past and the world around them. Instruction emphasizes meaning-making, evidence-based discourse, and multiple perspectives so that all students understand the human story — not just the facts of it.

Every instructional decision — from how we structure our lessons to how we select sources and assess student thinking — is made in service of this purpose. The beliefs and principles below describe what that looks like in practice.

CORE BELIEFS

We believe effective social studies instruction at ECS:

01 Engages students as active learners, thinkers, and investigators.

Social studies instruction prioritizes hands-on, experiential learning — simulations, projects, discussions, and inquiry — in which students are physically and mentally engaged through a variety of materials, resources, and methods. Passive reception of information is not enough.

Students are working more than teachers are talking.

02 Positions all students as historians, geographers, economists, and civic actors.

When instruction prioritizes inquiry and evidence, all students — regardless of reading level or background — can engage in the work of making sense of the human story. Our job is to create the conditions that make that possible.

03 Focuses on understanding the human story — not memorizing isolated facts.

Instruction focuses on the big questions of history, geography, economics, and civics. Students are expected to analyze, synthesize, and argue — not simply recall.

We teach the “why” behind events, not just the “what.”

04 Explicitly teaches and assesses historical thinking skills.

We explicitly teach chronology, change over time, point-of-view, compare and contrast, cause and effect, synthesis, and argumentation. These are not incidental — they are the foundation of everything students do in our classrooms.

05 Centers primary and secondary sources as core instructional tools.

Students regularly engage with images, artifacts, maps, political cartoons, charts, graphs, and document sets. They learn to evaluate accuracy, intent, perspective, and credibility. DBQs and close reading protocols are core instructional tools, beginning in kindergarten.

Sources are not supplements — they are the curriculum.

06 Builds vocabulary as a foundation for content mastery.

Teachers intentionally select and teach high-utility, content-specific vocabulary alongside grade-level academic words. Vocabulary is posted, practiced, and reinforced throughout each unit so every student can access and discuss content with confidence.

07 Integrates literacy, reasoning, and discourse as essential practices.

Reading, writing, and speaking are not just ELA skills — they are how historians communicate and how citizens engage. Students regularly read nonfiction and primary sources, write constructed responses and arguments, and participate in structured discussion.

08 Values and develops student voice.

Public speaking, debate, and Socratic seminar are valued components of instruction — planned and assessed with the same rigor as any other learning opportunity. Students in grades 6–8 engage in formal speaking assignments at least three times per year; grades 4–5 at least twice.

09 Builds perspective-taking and empathy as essential outcomes.

Understanding multiple perspectives — including those that are missing or underrepresented in traditional narratives — is not optional. We actively build students' capacity for empathy and civic awareness as part of our core instructional work.

10 Develops active citizens, beginning in the classroom.

Through discussion, investigation, reflection, and application to current events, students develop the habits of mind of informed, engaged citizens. Students leaving Endeavor should be ready to participate in a complex, interconnected world.

Active citizenship begins here, in this classroom, today.

11 Uses assessment to reflect mastery — not compliance.

Projects and assessments are grounded in grade-level standards, designed with embedded rigor, and evaluated using clear, measurable rubrics that minimize subjectivity and center student thinking. Rigor lives in the depth of thinking, not in the appearance of a project.

12 Is strengthened by a culture of teacher collaboration and shared ownership.

Grade level teams meet weekly, and monthly IMPACT meetings create dedicated time for teachers and instructional coaches to co-plan, co-teach, and reflect together — ensuring that instruction is continuously improving and vertically aligned across K–8.

INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN PRINCIPLES

These principles describe how our core beliefs translate into daily instructional practice.

Instructional Vision

Social studies instruction at ECS is standards-aligned to the North Carolina Standard Course of Study, inquiry-based following the Inquiry Design Model (IDM), grounded in primary and secondary source analysis, integrated with literacy and critical thinking, and experiential — emphasizing simulations, projects, and structured discussion. Instruction is differentiated to meet the needs, interests, and reading levels of all students.

Inquiry Design Model (IDM)

All grade levels structure learning around compelling questions that guide investigation. Students move through a consistent inquiry cycle: develop compelling and supporting questions → analyze sources and evidence → construct explanations and arguments → communicate conclusions and take informed action. Throughout this process, students are consistently asked: What happened? Why did it happen? What changed as a result? Whose perspectives are represented — and whose are missing?

Primary & Secondary Source Analysis

Teachers use primary and secondary sources at every grade level, beginning in kindergarten. Instruction incorporates images, artifacts, maps, political cartoons, charts, and graphs. Students are taught to evaluate accuracy, intent, perspective, and credibility. Document sets and close reading protocols — including DBQs — are regular instructional tools across all grade levels.

Explicit Vocabulary Instruction

Teachers identify and teach essential content vocabulary for each unit, posting words for student access throughout instruction. Explicit vocabulary instruction uses visuals, models, and examples. Students are held accountable for the accurate use of social studies vocabulary in both speaking and writing.

Literacy Integration

Social studies instruction integrates reading, writing, speaking, and listening at every grade level. Writing expectations increase in sophistication across grade bands: K–3 students draw, label,

write short responses, and give oral explanations; grades 4–5 write paragraph responses with basic citations and CER-style writing; grades 6–8 complete DBQs, formal arguments, research essays, and source evaluations.

Geography, Civics & Economics

Instruction develops geography skills — maps, globes, and spatial reasoning — alongside chronological thinking and use of timelines, understanding of civic roles and responsibilities, personal finance literacy and basic economic principles, and explicit connections between past events and current issues.

Student Discourse & Collaboration

Classrooms emphasize collaborative discussions, Socratic seminars, and structured debate. Students are expected to take and defend perspectives using evidence, engage in respectful discourse with peers, and present their thinking in both formal and informal settings. Teachers facilitate learning through questioning rather than lecture.

Classroom Culture and Learning Environment

Teachers intentionally cultivate classrooms where inquiry is normalized, all voices are valued, and student thinking is made visible. Vocabulary walls, anchor charts, and source sets are accessible and student-facing. Students develop historical thinking confidence, civic curiosity, and disciplinary habits of mind through consistent routines that honor analysis over recall and understanding over answer-getting.

WHAT WE EXPECT STUDENTS TO BE ABLE TO DO

As a result of consistent, high-quality social studies instruction, ECS students will:

✓	Understand the broad story of history and its relevance to the world today.
✓	Analyze events using evidence and multiple perspectives.
✓	Communicate ideas clearly in writing, discussion, and public speaking.
✓	Use maps, timelines, and sources fluently and independently.
✓	Evaluate information for credibility, bias, and intent.
✓	Demonstrate empathy, civic awareness, and readiness for active participation in society.

These beliefs and principles are not aspirations for the future — they are our commitments today. They guide every lesson we plan, every source we select, every question we ask, and every conversation we have about student learning.