

Middle School Social Studies Assessment

Background:

In 2012, the Maryland General Assembly passed Md. Ed. Art. §7-203(b)(3)(i). That statute states that:

“The State Board and the State Superintendent shall implement assessment programs in reading...and social studies that includes written responses;”

After a presentation to the State Board in February 2016, the State Board determined that a statewide assessment in social studies was required to be developed in order to comply with §7-203, but there was not enough time to meet a 2016-2017 school year timeline. The Board voted to draft a letter to leadership in the General Assembly requesting an extension to the deadline. In April of 2016, SB 533 amended §7-203 to delay implementation of the middle school exam “by two years, from the 2016-2017 school year to the 2018-2019 school year.”

The 24 LEA social studies supervisors, in consultation with the MSDE Social Studies Office agree that if a middle school exam is administered, the best time is at the end of the 8th grade. This allows students to spend three years learning and practicing the social studies skills and processes that will be assessed on the exam. It also allows the exam results to be used by middle school social studies staffs to evaluate the efficacy of their programs.

Administering the exam in the 8th grade enables MSDE and its sub-contractor to design an exam that will measure student knowledge of commonly taught content. United States History is taught in grade 8 in 24 LEAs. Grades 6 and 7 social studies instruction does not afford the same level of *content consistency* as 8th grade. Currently, MSDE is working with school districts and teachers to revise the 8th grade framework and develop assessment limits for skills and processes

Although implementation of the middle school social studies assessment was delayed, the new timeline requires a contractor to be on board by June 2017.

The following timeline is being utilized by MSDE to meet the requirement for a middle school social studies assessment as set out in state law ED §7-203 (as amended in April 2016).

April 1, 2016	Amendment approved allowing two year delay of middle school assessment.
July 2016-June 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Districts and MSDE begin revision of 8th grade United States History state standards, establish assessment limits, suggest question types and test design • Districts and MSDE work in vertical articulation within middle school curricula to scaffold appropriate skills from the 6.0 Social Studies Skills and Processes document.
Fall/Winter 2016	Write RFP so middle school assessment is included in Fiscal 2017-2018
April 2017	RFP Issued
Summer 2017	Contract awarded
Fall 2017	Item development and stimulus review begins
January 2018	Initial field test of items
Summer 2018	Item review and range-finding
January 2019	Middle School Exam is operational to be administered as a mid-course/end of middle school assessment

In June of 2016, the Assessment Commission empaneled by the Maryland General Assembly issued its recommendations regarding reducing the footprint of assessment. In Recommendation 2.1A, the Commission recommended that: “The creation of an additional assessment in social studies at the middle school level **should not go forward.**”

Twenty local Boards of Education supported the Commission’s recommendation. However, The State Board recommended “*The creation of an additional assessment in social studies at the middle school level should not go forward **at this time.***” signaling the interest in furtherer consider of the issue. And Maryland’s Social Studies Supervisors remain largely supportive of a middle level test.

The dilemma for MSDE is that, while the fate of the test is uncertain, unless and until the law changes, there is an obligation to follow the existing law, and therefore prepare to administer a state-wide assessment in 2018-2019

Conclusion:

If the upcoming legislative session votes to eliminate the middle school social studies assessment, the State Board still has authority to require the implementation of a social studies assessment. The table below presents actions the Board can consider.

Option #	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3	Option 4
Board Action	Board does not act.	Board supports the decision of the Legislators in consideration of the Commission recommendation.	Board supports an amendment to delay the middle school exam.	Board supports Assessment Commission recommendation to eliminate the exam, but institutes an exam via COMAR rather than via legislation. Would require legislation to overturn original statute and a Board to alter COMAR to require the exam.
Legislative Action	No change is made to existing law.	Law is passed to eliminate the Middle School Soc. Studies Test	Law is passed to further delay the test	Law is passed to eliminate the Middle School Soc. Studies Test
Result	Middle School Exam will begin in the 2018-2019 school year.	Middle School exam will not be administered.	Date for exam will be determined by the State Board in conversation with the General Assembly.	Middle School social studies exam would begin at a date to be determined by the Board.

Middle School Assessment Talking Points

1. In 2012, the Maryland General Assembly passed §7-203(b)(3)(i), that required an assessment in middle school assessment be implemented in 2016-17
2. In April of 2016, SB 533 amended §7-203 to delay implementation of the middle school exam by two years, to the 2018-2019 school year
3. In July 2016, the legislative Commission on Assessment report recommended the development of a middle school test “not go forward.”
4. Because that law is still in effect, staff has been working toward implementation of an 8th grade assessment.
5. The RFP for the assessment must be issued this spring, with the associated costs for test development, administration, and scoring.
6. The legislative go/no-go decision on the middle school assessment will likely be finalized in the late spring. Staff is seeking guidance.
7. The State Board of Education has the authority to require the assessment w/o the legislative mandate.
8. The Board can direct staff to publish the RFP by a specified date (May 2017)
9. It can also petition the legislature for another year extension.

Civics Education Talking Points

1. Social Studies standards are comprehensive and address all aspects of the discipline. Civics is one of six core standards.
2. Civics is taught across all grade levels in developmentally appropriate ways using familiar contexts.
3. Learning expectations grow in depth and breadth as students mature.
4. To graduate, high school students must pass courses in American Government, United States and World History.
5. They must also pass a high school assessment in American Government. This exam requires students to demonstrate knowledge of:
 - the origins of democracy,
 - the Constitution and Bill of Rights,
 - the powers and responsibilities of the three branches of government,
 - landmark Supreme Court decisions,
 - voting and our political system
 - basic economic concepts.

Civics and Maryland

Civics is an essential component of Maryland's state standards. As required by COMAR, Maryland has five content and one skills and processes standard for social studies. The standards are divided into:

- Standard 1.0: Civics
- Standard 2.0: People of the Nation and the World
- Standard 3.0: Geography
- Standard 4.0: Economics
- Standard 5.0: History
- Standard 6.0: Social Studies Skills and Processes

At each grade level, social studies courses are structured so that students are exposed to content that illuminate each of the standards. As a result, Maryland students learn civics concepts beginning in kindergarten through high school. The knowledge base, skills and processes involved in the teaching of civics is abstract.

- What is governance?
- What is a law?
- What is a vote?
- What does it mean to be a good citizen?

Though civics is taught across the grades, it is done in developmentally appropriate ways. In primary classrooms these answers may be: [Governance is] the things we all do in class that help us get along; and we know what is okay and what is not because we have classroom rules (laws); etc.

Teachers use students' developing understanding of their world and how it works: in the family/classroom, in their community, in our state, in our history, and in our time.

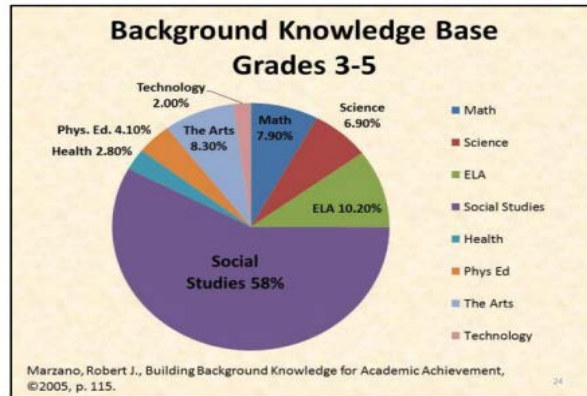
The Civics Standard states "Students will understand the historical development and current status of the democratic principles and the development of skills and attitudes necessary to become responsible citizens." Within Standard 1.0, students are asked to examine:

- The Foundations and Function of Government
- Individual and Group Participation in the Political System
- Protecting Rights and Maintaining Order

The most significant deficit in students' social studies education is at the elementary school level. The curriculum narrowing that occurred in response to federally mandated testing in reading, mathematics, and science has forced districts to make pragmatic decisions regarding the allocation of instructional time, resources, and staffing. In Maryland, as outlined in the *Task Force Report on Social Studies in Maryland: The Challenge and the Imperative*, curriculum narrowing occurring led to a dramatic drop in instructional time, staffing, and the overall perception of the importance of a social studies education (http://www.marylandpublicschools.org/about/Documents/DCAA/Social_Studies_Taskforce_Report_2010.pdf, pages 8-14). Subsequent yearly data acquired from Maryland Social Studies teachers and supervisors indicates a continued diminution of the time spent on social studies in elementary schools (http://mdk12.org/instruction/curriculum/social_studies/2015_Social_Studies_Survey_Results.pdf).

The loss of basic understanding about geography, economics, history and civics hurts the ability of students to become effective readers. Essential to building effective readers is to expand students'

background knowledge. The work of Robert Marzano clearly demonstrates that 55% of the content background knowledge needed for students to access what they read comes from the core four disciplines of social studies: History, geography, civics/government, and economics. (*Broad Knowledge drives literacy: Building a diverse academic knowledge base contributes to the ongoing development of reading and writing skills.*).



By integrating social studies back into the grade 3-5 experience for all students we can provide opportunities for students to not only learn to read, but to develop the background knowledge that will enable them to become even better readers. This is consistent with the fact that all The Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for Career and College (PARCC) non-fiction reading from authentic text taken from the disciplines of social studies and science.

By high school, students must pass courses in American Government, United States and World History. All Maryland students must pass a high school assessment in American Government. This exam requires students to demonstrate knowledge about the origins of democracy, the Constitution and Bill of Rights, the powers and responsibilities of the three branches of government, landmark Supreme Court decisions, voting, and basic economic concepts.