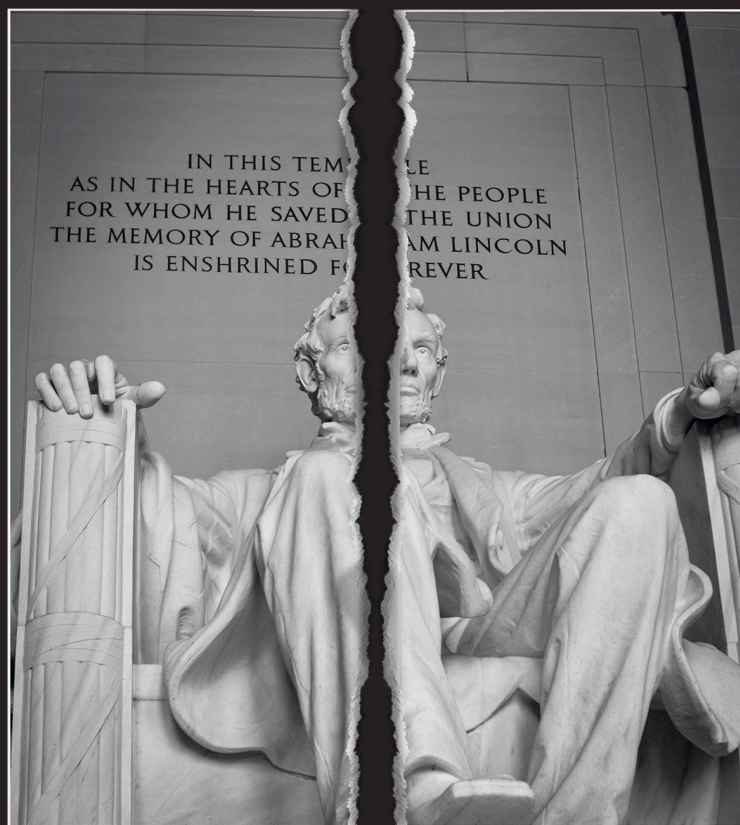
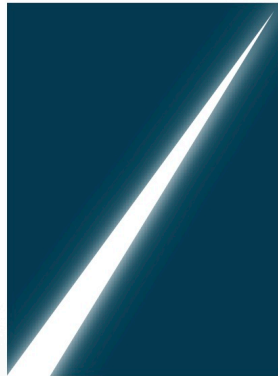


PRESERVING HISTORY

PROBLEMS WITH KENTUCKY'S SOCIAL STUDIES STANDARDS,
MUST BE REDONE



a Bluegrass Institute Policy Point by Richard Innes
September 2020



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PRESERVING HISTORY

Problems with Kentucky’s Social Studies Standards, Must be Redone

A Bluegrass Institute Policy Point by Richard G. Innes
September 2020

Executive Summary

Last summer Kentucky adopted some extremely deficient social studies standards¹ for use in each of the commonwealth’s 1,466 public elementary and secondary schools. In this Policy Note, we probe some of the many problems with these Revised Standards, as we shall refer to them throughout this analysis, and provide potential solutions to addressing the serious educational deficiencies involved.

In general, the Revised Standards excessively focus on process activities such as “Inquiry Learning”² while coverage of an extremely large amount of factual content every Kentucky student should know is clearly deficient and truly alarming. As a result of the lack of these specifics, the standards don’t provide anything close to adequate guidance for what our students should know and be able to do when they complete their studies.

The Revised Standards, at best, provide only extremely deficient information to teachers, test writers and, most importantly, our students. Thus, they set the stage for yet another round of test-driven curriculum in Kentucky’s classrooms.

Even worse, new evidence assembled by Bluegrass Institute Scholar Gary Houchens, Ph.D., regarding highly disturbing features of training material for teachers makes it clear that the lack of detail in the standards opens the door to not just inadequate instruction but highly biased and inappropriate teaching of social studies in Kentucky’s public school classrooms.

Deficiencies in the Revised Standards are evident even at the most basic level. Per the National Council for the Social Studies, social studies include at least 13 separate disciplines such as “History,” “Civics,” “Law,” “Geography,” “Religion” and “Sociology.” But only four limited “strands” are listed as the focus of Kentucky’s new Revised Standards. The other nine discipline strands receive no focus at all.

On a more detailed level, history is astonishingly depersonalized in the Revised Standards with no mention of numerous key historical figures every Kentucky child should learn about. These bewildering omissions include many US presidents such as John Adams, James Madison, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Theodore Roosevelt and even Abraham Lincoln, Kentucky’s highly honored native son.

Aside from failing to name many political leaders of great historical importance, the omissions extend to prominent individual achievers in other fields, such as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and


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Cornelius Vanderbilt. Furthermore, every major player in the important story of American exceptionalism is missing, including important and inspiring inventors like Alexander Graham Bell, the Wright Brothers, George Washington Carver and Thomas Edison, just to name a few.

A great deal of other important content also goes unlisted. Coverage of many key topics in geography – even such extremely basic material as ensuring Kentucky’s public school students learn that our earth has a North and South Pole and an equator – is totally omitted.

Another major issue, which the legislature demonstrated it clearly understood during the debate over Senate Bill 1 (SB 1) from the 2017 Regular Session,³ is that standards must provide notice about what could be covered on state assessments. SB 1 stipulates that material not included in the approved standards cannot appear on state tests, making it essential that standards are complete and detailed. Vague standards cannot meet the legal requirement for due notice about what may be included on state tests and set the assessment program up for a legal challenge.

There are additional concerns about the age-appropriateness of some material. The Bluegrass Institute briefly compared the Revised Standards to recently updated social studies standards from Massachusetts, a state highly regarded for its coverage of history. It wasn’t hard to find numerous examples of things specifically included in the standards from Massachusetts that go completely unmentioned in the Revised Standards. However, even when needed subjects are covered in Kentucky’s Revised Standards, they tend to get introduced to students several grade levels later than in Massachusetts. For example, the Civil War isn’t introduced in Kentucky’s standards until the eighth grade. In Massachusetts, introduction to this war starts in the fifth grade. This scenario confirms our concern that the Revised Standards are a recipe for Kentucky’s children to get left behind.

“
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TO BE


Along with the failure to mention myriad individuals who dot the history of America’s landscape is the problem that much of the coverage in Kentucky’s standards is far too vague, forcing teachers and test writers to make far too many assumptions about what’s in and what’s out.

The vague nature of the Revised Standards could open the door for yet another round of test-driven instruction in Kentucky’s classrooms. As with curriculum writers and teachers, ambiguous standards leave test writers largely on their own to determine exactly what should, and could, be

covered on state tests and how good a performance from each student will be considered adequate.

Under these conditions, it won’t take long for the Revised Standards to become essentially meaningless as teachers instead take their cues from the types of questions they see on the state assessments, rendering the curriculum a reflection of a set of criteria unavailable to the public.

Perhaps most disturbing of all, vague standards open the door wide for inappropriate teaching. Training documents and videos created by the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) to help further explain the excessively vague standards make it clear such inappropriate teaching is a concern. A series of training videos known as the Inquiry Ready Modules were examined by Bluegrass Institute Scholar Gary Houchens, Ph.D., and found to be extremely problematic.

Houchens, a professor of education at Western Kentucky University with a background in social studies, writes about the Inquiry Ready Modules in a recent blog, saying, ***“Kentucky teachers are being encouraged to use “inquiry methods” to indoctrinate students in Leftist attitudes.”***⁴ Houchens indicates these Modules were not formerly available to parents or community members until he posted the links on his website. Houchens adds, ***“Unfortunately, these Inquiry Ready modules provide enormous potential for abuse, and especially for students to be indoctrinated in leftist ideology.”***

Such concerns are further reinforced by some of the more incredible omissions in the current standards which we searched in vain for any mention of the following terms: “fascist,” “fascism,” “communism,” “communist,” “socialism,” “Marx” and “Marxist.” At a time when many young people in America display a disturbing lack of knowledge about such philosophies and their harmful natures, failing to mention these specific topics in the standards is worrisome.

With that overview complete, let’s examine the issues in more detail.

Legal issues

When considering the Revised Standards, it must be kept in mind that a body of law which has existed for some time indicates material not in the approved Kentucky standards isn’t allowed on state assessments.⁵

This legal restriction is made very clear in Senate Bill 1 (SB 1) from the Kentucky 2017 Regular Legislative Session, which discusses the legal impact of standards approved by the state Board of Education on the commonwealth’s assessments. The law specifically stipulates:

“The statewide assessments shall not include any academic standards not approved by the board under subsection (2) of this section.”⁶

This wise provision in Kentucky law is supported by recognized experts in the area of academic standards, including Daniel Walker Howe, Anders Lewis and Bill Donovan who write in their 2017 report, “Laboratories of Democracy: How States Get Excellent K–12 U.S. History Standards”:

“...standards should be detailed and specific. State history tests...must be based directly on standards that leave no room for ambiguity. Teachers and students should not have to guess what would be on a state history test...”⁷

Thus, both common sense and Kentucky law specify that if it isn’t in the standards, Kentucky can’t put it in state assessments. Guessing and assumptions about what can be tested are unacceptable.

It’s obvious Kentucky’s standards must be much more complete if they’re to provide a suitable, unambiguous and legally sufficient basis for the state’s assessments. Vague standards that force educators and test creators to guess about what is and isn’t included are a recipe for trouble. Due to a massive lack of detail, the final version of the Revised Standards doesn’t fulfill this legal requirement.

Aside from the impacts of the standards on assessment, other legal issues are present in the Revised Standards. One problem is that the standards seem to have been created without a full appreciation of the importance and authority of the School-Based Decision Making (SBDM) councils in relationship to standards and the resulting curriculum. While the councils have ultimate authority regarding curriculum, it’s an enormous responsibility. Their members can be

really challenged to muster the expertise, training and time to adopt high quality curricula unless there are very clear and detailed standards to guide them.

During creation of the current Kentucky Academic Standards (KAS), repeated comments were submitted to the standards-creation team that councils needed much more consideration, including more details concerning their role in the standards document. However, it was only very late in the process, at the time of the creation of the Statement of Consideration for 704 KAR 8:060 – the adopting regulation for the standards, that there was begrudging admission that such coverage was in fact needed. Nevertheless, the Statement of Consideration's Band-Aid fix regarding SBDM councils actually made things worse. The Statement of Consideration says:

“However, based on feedback provided, the section entitled Translating the Standards into Curriculum will be modified to provide greater clarity on the role of the SBDM in implementing the proposed KAS for Social Studies. The original text in the document stated ‘local schools and districts choose to meet those minimum required standards using a locally adopted curriculum.’ The agency concurs with the commenter that this statement may need additional clarity; therefore, the agency will add ‘local schools and districts choose to meet those minimum required standards using a locally adopted curriculum according to KRS 158.6453, which outlines the SBDM’s role in determining curriculum.’”⁸

The problem here is that KRS 158.6453 does not deal with school council responsibilities regarding the adoption of social studies curriculum. KRS 158.6453 only discusses council responsibilities to report about what they did with the curriculum once it was adopted.

The actual guiding language regarding SBDM councils' responsibilities for curriculum in general is found in KRS 160.345 (2)(i). The fact that school councils control curriculum under the authority of KRS 160.345 is further supported by this direct and unmistakably clear explanatory comment found in the 2018 Kentucky School Laws Annotated edition on Page 872:

“School council has the authority to determine the school curriculum....”⁹

Thus, the Revised Standards remain deficient regarding the consideration and discussion of the legal requirements involving school councils and social studies.

Another potential legal issue regarding the supposed impact of the SBDM law on what can be put into the state's education standards was raised in recent testimony to the Administrative Regulation Review Subcommittee when in May 2019 KDE representatives claimed the standards had to be limited to avoid interfering with the school councils' authority for curriculum.

That justification doesn't hold up, however, considering that Kentucky in 2010 adopted the Common Core State Standards for subjects of math, reading and writing and in 2013 the state also adopted the Next Generation Science Standards. All those standards packages have detailed content requirements and were written outside of Kentucky with absolutely no consideration of SBDM laws. If there really was an issue in Kentucky that required only vague standards, then the adoption of the Common Core and NextGen Science would have been inappropriate. However, the precedents from those standards packages confirm the notion that only vague standards are acceptable in Kentucky is in error and the SBDM law cannot excuse the deficiencies in the Revised Standards.

The Revised Standards present other legal issues, as well. Table 1 summarizes some of those legal concerns.

Table 1	
Potential Statutory/Legal Issues in Kentucky’s Revised Social Studies Standards	
Page(s) in the Standards	Problem
7 - 9	In general, the discussion of pertinent regulations for social studies on Pages 7 to 9 in the Revised Standards completely omits a most important statute, KRS 160.345. KRS 160.345 should be included as it adds broad, additional requirement to include the SBDM councils in many of the curriculum development actions required by the statutes that are listed in the Revised Standards on Pages 7 to 9. Omission of this critical statute and the general lack of coverage of SBDM council responsibilities in regard to the Revised Standards create an impression that the Revised Standards were written without consideration of the needs of the SBDM councils. Regardless, the councils are a major audience for the standards, and council needs must be extensively considered in any Kentucky academic standards package.
8	House Bill 128 passed by the legislature in 2018 requires instruction about the Holocaust and other cases of genocide. This legal requirement is mentioned in the beginning section of the Revised Standards. However, the terms “Holocaust” and “genocide” appear nowhere else in the document. In what grade(s) will each school cover this mandatory information? When does this subject become fair game for assessment? Because no grade(s) for coverage are ever specified, there likely will be haphazard coverage statewide. Worse, coverage of the material might never happen at all if teachers assume they have no responsibility for teaching it and their colleagues at other grade levels are dealing with the requirement.
8	In the discussion regarding the instruction students receive about voting requirements related to KRS 158.6450, the Revised Standards say: <i>A school may provide this information through classroom activities, written materials, electronic communication, Internet resources, participation in mock elections and other methods identified by the principal after consulting with teachers.</i> However, as previously noted, KRS 160.345 additionally indicates that school councils are required to adopt policies regarding procedures consistent with local school board policy for determining alignment with state standards. The Revised Standards should point to this <u>additional</u> legal requirement in a way that insures this important educational activity is properly developed. Failing to advise educators that an additional legal requirement aside from KRS 158.6450 pertains could result in violations of Kentucky’s SBDM law by school personnel.
8-9	The KRS 158.075 statutory cite in the standards that requires a Veterans Day observance in public schools correctly mentions the principal is ultimately responsible. Unmentioned, however, is the fact that under KRS 160.345 the school council is required to advise the principal because this is implementation of standards, as well.

To summarize on the legal issues surrounding 704 KAR 8:060, problems, such as an incorrect citation of law, indicate writers of the Revised Standards lack understanding of the requirements of Kentucky’s SBDM statutes, a troubling misunderstanding that implies the writers don’t recognize or comprehend the key role of what should be a major audience for their standards. Did the creators of the Revised Standards appreciate the fact that the ultimate responsibility to create supporting curriculum for those standards normally is placed way down at the school level where resources are more limited and extra guidance in the form of a far more complete set of standards would be appropriate?

Also, it appears the writers never understood the implications of the standards as the notice document for what can appear on state assessments. In the current climate where state assessments in general are coming under increasing attack, that deficiency could lead to a situation where the assessment program might eventually be challenged and found illegal. That would be an expensive and unfortunate loss for the commonwealth.

Omissions of basic social studies content are massive

Equally as significant as the legal issues are massive omissions in the Revised Standards of important, basic core content every Kentucky child should learn.

The standards send a message that the inquiry process trumps content, an especially damaging message considering research increasingly shows that content knowledge in social studies is as crucial for basic reading proficiency as it is for true understanding of the social studies themselves.¹⁰

Omissions in the Revised Standards are painfully obvious even at a very basic level. The “Design Considerations” found on Page 11 indicate social studies has only four disciplinary strands: civics, geography, economics and history.

That limited set of strands doesn’t agree with mainstream definitions for the social studies. As summarized in Table 2, even the KDE’s own website page for social studies currently indicates several additional disciplinary strands pertain, including anthropology, archaeology, law, philosophy, political science, psychology, religion, sociology as well as content from the humanities.¹¹

KDE’s definition of social studies appears to mirror the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS).¹² NCSS’ listing also mentions integration from “Mathematics” and “Natural Science” in addition to each of the 13 disciplines listed in Table 2.

Why are these national-organization-recognized and important basic social studies discipline areas either being ignored completely or at least degraded in importance in Kentucky’s Revised Standards?

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”

Table 2	
Social Studies Strands Included and Omitted in the Revised Standards Based on Social Studies Topics Listed on the KDE’s website	
Disciplinary Strands Included	Disciplinary Strands not Included
Civics	Anthropology
Geography	Archaeology
Economics	Law
History	Philosophy
	Political Science
	Psychology
	Religion
	Sociology
	Humanities

History depersonalized

Jeff Shaara, an award-winning historical novelist, could easily point to one of the major problems in the Revised Standards. In the introduction to his novel, “A Blaze of Glory,” Shaara says:

“If you have read any of my books, you know that these stories are driven not by events, but by characters. For me, the points of view of the characters in this story are more appealing than the blow-by-blow facts and figures that are the necessary products of history textbooks”.¹³

As Shaara knows, details about the personalities involved with history enliven and flesh out the story best.

However, only cursory mentions are made of only very few historical personalities in Revised Standards. Glaringly missing even from these mentions are their backstories explaining that which made them noteworthy in American history.

A listing in Grade 5 standard 5.H.CE.1 mentions George Washington, Thomas Jefferson and Sam Adams.

Another listing in Grade 4 standard 4.G.KGE.1 mentions Daniel Boone.

Finally, a Grade 8 listing in a “Disciplinary Clarification”¹⁴ for standard 8.C.KGO.1 mentions Henry Clay.

The first three individuals are named only as representative examples for many otherwise unnamed individuals involved with the American Revolution. Why, if Washington, Jefferson and

Sam (but not John) Adams are listed, are many other very important figures from the American Revolution ignored? How can teachers know which other Revolutionary era personalities should be covered? How can people writing the assessments know which personalities to cover? Is any of Washington’s history prior to the Revolution to be covered? In fact, given the legal discussion above, can test writers even ask questions about any personalities other than those few listed in the standards?

A motivational quote from Rosa Parks, the only other historical personality named anywhere in the standards, is included in introductory material on Page 10 of the Revised Standards. Parks, however, is nowhere actually listed in any specific standard for any grade. If, let alone when, Parks and her famous bus ride might actually be covered is never specified. Can Kentucky’s assessments ask a question about Parks? If so, what’s the earliest grade such a question is legal?

Aside from those individuals mentioned above, a search in the PDF version of the Revised Standards for other extremely prominent individuals in American and world history – including individuals named in other state standards such as those found in Massachusetts and even Mississippi shows all are ignored.

It’s a glaring error to leave it to assumption whether or not Kentucky’s children specifically learn about major historical personages such as Franklin Roosevelt, Harry Truman, Benjamin Franklin, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and even Abraham Lincoln just because some events they’re associated with are covered. None are mentioned anywhere in these seriously deficient standards.

Also absent from the Revised Standards are all key individuals who contributed greatly to the development of American exceptionalism and industrial achievement. Just a few key names on the list of omitted personages include Thomas Edison and Alexander Graham Bell. Also unmentioned is George Washington Carver, an African-American born to slaves in 1864 who became a noted scientist and college educator.¹⁵ Nothing in the Revised Standards ensures Kentucky’s students will learn about any of these individuals.

Highly regarded state social studies standards such as those from Massachusetts¹⁶ handle personalities quite differently. An incomplete listing of important historical personages ignored by the Revised Kentucky Standards but found in Massachusetts’ recently approved 2018 standards are included in Table 3.

Table 3		
<u>Partial</u> Listing of Key Historical Personalities Listed in Massachusetts’ 2018 Social Studies Standards but Omitted from Kentucky’s Revised Social Studies Standards		
Lord Baltimore	Roger Williams	William Penn
Benjamin Franklin	James Madison	King George III
John Winthrop	John Smith	John Dewey
Franklin D. Roosevelt	Theodore Roosevelt	Dwight D. Eisenhower
Thomas Edison	John D. Rockefeller	Abraham Lincoln
Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.	Harriet Tubman	Alexander Hamilton
Alexander Graham Bell	Andrew Carnegie	Cornelius Vanderbilt

Note: Many of these names appear multiple times in the Massachusetts standards.

Massachusetts' standards, while imperfect (Carver, for example, isn't mentioned), are far stronger than Kentucky's Revised Standards. In fact, those 2018 Massachusetts standards and an earlier 2003 version were available and could have provided an excellent roadmap for a much better Kentucky product. It's interesting to note that the Massachusetts standards, while far more complete than Kentucky's, do require students to engage in inquiry activities and nevertheless are all contained in a 220-page document. Kentucky's current standards are 229 pages long but feature far less meat and much more repetition.

Intentional depersonalization

Developments leading to the adoption of these depersonalized history standards suggest the decision to exclude individuals' names was intentional.

For example, in the Statement of Consideration for the regulation that adopted the social studies, 704 KAR 8:060, it is mentioned that:

“Six commenters stated that the standards are general, vague and depersonalized.

Three comments were specific to the lack of “historical personages” in the KAS for Social Studies.”¹⁷

However, the department's response ducks these specific concerns about the absence of most historic personalities in the document, basically ignoring the issue while failing to provide a suitable defense for the policy.

More evidence of the intentionality of the omission of historic personages in the standards surfaced during the Kentucky Legislature's Administrative Regulation Review Subcommittee hearing on May 14, 2019, on the enabling regulation for the Revised Standards. Regarding concerns about depersonalization in the standards, summarizing the sentiments of his staff, Kentucky Commissioner of Education Wayne Lewis' commented that:

“I cannot in a standard list Dr. King by name or Rosa Parks by name.”

So, the philosophy at the department was to avoid including the names of key historical figures in the standards.

The department's position is just not right, however, on several counts. As previously mentioned, the Revised Standards do in fact mention a few historical figures such as Washington, Jefferson and Clay by name. And, while not in a formal individual grade's standards, the Revised Standards do mention Rosa Parks in the introductory material on Page 6, at least somewhat refuting the commissioner's claim in May 2019.

There is a bigger issue, however. How is it that Massachusetts and other states are able to agree on a minimum list of personalities to include in their standards while Kentucky shied away from this educational duty?

Also, especially given recent events around the nation, how, exactly, can Kentucky explain to others why its social studies standards hardly list any historical figures but do include two white slaveholders while not naming either King or Lincoln in those same standards?

Awkward examples of the purposeful omissions of key historical figures are found in other parts of the document, as well. Consider the material presented for Kentucky's Revised Standard for First Grade, 1.C.KGO.2 ***“Investigate how civic identity is shaped by symbolic figures, places and events.”*** The Disciplinary Clarifications section of the Revised Standards on Page 43 reads:

“Civic identity can be shaped by diverse historical figures from the state, local communities, and unique places, which may include, but are not limited to, Churchill Downs, Mammoth Cave and the Appalachian Mountains, as well as events that have shaped civic identity in Kentucky like national conflicts.”

How will local curriculum developers interpret this puzzling “clarification” that actually lists some specific places in Kentucky like Mammoth Cave and Churchill Downs yet fails to mention even a single historical figure? Does this imply that historical figures don't need to be included?

Also, how will teachers know what minimal list of events they should definitely include among those which have shaped civic identity in the Bluegrass State? What are those events? Furthermore, since no events are specifically listed, can questions about events which have shaped Kentucky's civic identity legally be included on the assessments? Would it be fair to test students on those events when there's no guarantee students will have a chance to learn about them?

Thanks to school councils' responsibility for curriculum in Kentucky, this vague elementary school standard could result in over 700 vastly different answers – a different one for each elementary school in the state – regarding which, if any, historical figures and events each first-grade student in Kentucky will learn about. Certainly, the standard is far too vague to establish anything approaching a common core of social studies knowledge across Kentucky.

It's also fair to question the age-appropriateness of this first grade standard. Does this particular standard seem written in terms suitable to guide a first grade discussion?

So, in general, the Revised Standards lead Kentucky's social studies teachers to primarily focus on events but not on the people behind them. Mr. Shaara would be shocked.

Inevitably, without even a minimally acceptable listing of essential historical figures all Kentucky students should know, the Revised Standards render it unlikely that Kentucky youngsters will gain any sort of common minimum core of such knowledge. This deficiency is particularly troubling in light of a recent report from the Woodrow Wilson Foundation¹⁸ showing adult Kentuckians currently have the second-worst knowledge of US history among residents of all 50 states.

While the determination of names to be included or excluded from a set of social studies standards is indeed challenging, other states have stepped up to the plate and managed to do this. There simply must be an agreed-upon core of personalities all students in Kentucky are expected to know. Ducking the responsibility for creating that list isn't acceptable.

The Revised Standards create another problem regarding included and omitted historical personalities. Because a few personages such as Washington and Adams are mentioned, there's an implication that the omitted persons are intentionally not included. As such, the language from SB-1, 2017 RS, which states that material not in the approved standards cannot

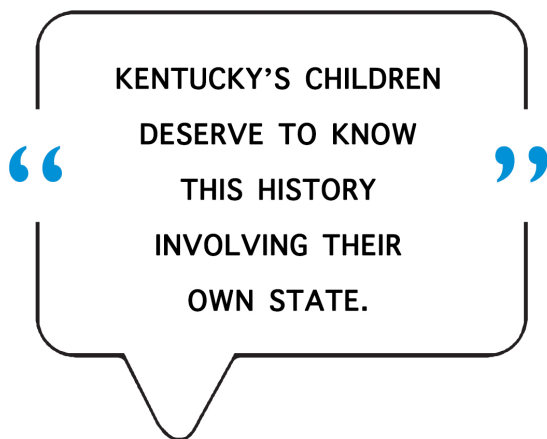
be tested, comes into play very strongly. Under these standards, could it actually be illegal for a Kentucky social studies assessment to ask a question about Abraham Lincoln? Do we want standards that create such uncertainties?

Historical figures not the only unit of learning ignored

Aside from a dearth of historical personages, drilling a bit deeper shows a lot of interesting Kentucky history is also missing from the Revised Standards.

For example, the Battle of Blue Licks, which was fought on Kentucky soil and ended up being the last significant skirmish of the American Revolution, is unmentioned.¹⁹ Kentucky’s children deserve to know this history involving their own state.

There’s also significant omission of key terminology, particularly so for geography. While a few mapping terms such as “Longitude” and “Latitude” appear, many additional terms of importance such as “Equator,” “Greenwich (or Prime) Meridian,” “Topographic Map,” “Mercator Projection,” “Volcano,” “North Pole,” “South Pole” and “Mount Everest” are absent throughout the entire kindergarten to Grade 12 coverage.



Along these lines, the “Key Vocabulary” listings for each grade are extremely trivial and incomplete. The listing for Grade 3 includes just 21 items for the entire year. Furthermore, the Revised Standards say the actual curriculum “may” include these terms. “May” is not a term suitable for use in definitive standards. The use of “may” means these terms aren’t considered mandatory knowledge. How will test creators interpret this? Should we even bother to include such lists if they’re only going to be trivially inadequate?

Keep in mind that SB 1 from the 2017 Regular Session makes it reasonable for teachers and test writers to assume that omitted terminology is outside the standards and therefore cannot be tested.

Considering the historical tendency for Kentucky teachers to teach to the test, these omissions open the door wide for questions about whether such important and basic material will actually be taught consistently across the commonwealth.

Some omissions are truly puzzling. The “Pacific Ocean” is never mentioned but there are multiple references to the Indian Ocean Maritime System developed in ancient times. There also are mentions of the “Atlantic System” regarding trade, but the term “Atlantic Ocean” never appears. Terms like “Antarctic” and “Arctic” never appear, either. These standards in their present form certainly don’t offer assurance that students will learn these basic and key geographical terms.

Will Kentucky’s children learn our earth has a North and South Pole? If we can’t test for those terms because they’re not listed in the Revised Standards, how will we know?

By the way, deficiencies in the area of geography are particularly puzzling because Page 10 of the draft standards indicates the standards-creation team looked at the National Geographic Society’s “Geography for Life: The National Geography Standards, Second

Edition.”²⁰ However, it seems like the National Geographic Society’s guidance received rather cursory attention, at best. The fact that such detailed geographical standards information was available and apparently was largely ignored by creators of the Kentucky draft standards raises more disquieting questions about thoroughness and attention to detail.

It’s also worth noting that, despite the large number of strands covered by other, well-organized social studies programs, the length of the Revised Standards is shorter (just 229 pages in total) compared to recently approved standards for Kentucky in the areas of reading and writing²¹ (458 pages) and mathematics²² (258 pages). Neither of those more-focused academic areas have nearly as many disciplinary strands to cover but are still longer than the current social studies standards.

For sure, massive omissions in the Revised Standards force far too many assumptions on those who must develop curriculum or assessments for social studies.

Age appropriateness?

One disturbing result from the Bluegrass Institute’s limited comparison to Massachusetts’ standards (see Table 4 below) is that in too many cases – even when the Revised Kentucky Standards do call for material to be covered – it’s not first included until considerably later grades than those specified in the Bay State. Clearly, the Revised Standards would leave Kentucky students well behind their contemporaries in other states.

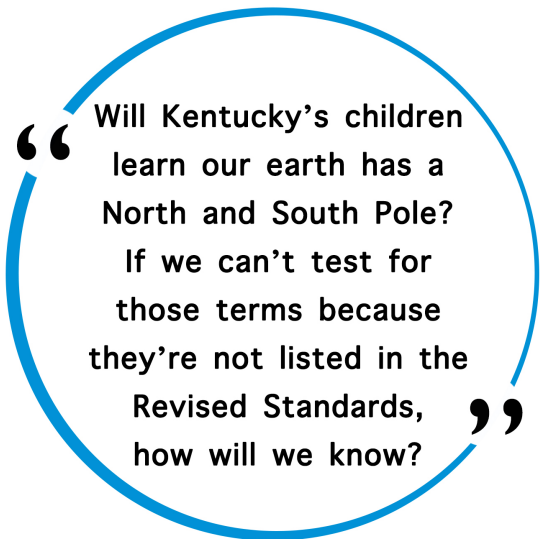
There are other areas in the Revised Standards where consideration of the students’ readiness seems doubtful. I already touched on one example where first-grade teachers are left to guess about what to include in **“events that have shaped civic identity in Kentucky like national conflicts.”**

Another example is found in the Disciplinary Clarifications for Kindergarten Standard K.G.HI.1. There the standards talk about **“a rule posted on the wall which says to take turns when speaking.”**

This is a standard for kindergarteners. I suspect such young students are not ready to read rules posted on a wall.

In fact, anyone trying to get kindergarteners to do this sort of reading activity would probably be pushing sight-word reading approaches that are highly inappropriate for beginning readers. A growing body of research papers, including the National Reading Panel’s report in 2000²³ and more recent studies using functional MRI techniques,²⁴ indicate that students first need to learn phonics or they actually can wind up using the wrong side of their brain for reading activities. Could implementing this Disciplinary Clarification actually contribute to inappropriate teaching of reading?

Another major deficiency – No performance standards



Another major deficiency in the standards is their failure to provide any information about how success in mastering the standards will be measured. This omission will have adverse impacts on curriculum writers, teachers and especially test creators, for whom questions about what to include and how to grade it are major concerns. Performance standards are needed, but the draft offers none.

The Revised Standards compare poorly against those from other states with highly regarded standards

In Table 4 we summarize the results of a brief comparison of Kentucky’s Revised Standards to the latest Massachusetts standards released in 2018, including examples of how Kentucky’s current standards remain notably incomplete compared to what’s outlined in the Bay State’s very highly regarded material.

Note: Massachusetts titles its standards as a “framework” but the format and use of the Massachusetts document is similar to the “standards” used in Kentucky because the Massachusetts document outlines material which can appear on that state’s assessments.

Table 4	
Comparison of Kentucky’s Current Social Studies Standards to Massachusetts’ (MA) 2018 Standards	
Kentucky’s Current Standard	Comparison from Massachusetts
The Civil War isn’t mentioned until Grade 8.	MA starts Civil War in Grade 5. (Pg. 18)
No mention of the “Colonial Era” until Grade 8.	MA starts Colonial Period topic in Grade 3. (Pg. 45)
No mention of the term “Pilgrim.” (Thanksgiving also not mentioned)	MA starts discussing Pilgrims in detail in Grade 3. (Pg. 52) Thanksgiving is mentioned, too. (Pg. 55)

Table 4	
Comparison of Kentucky's Current Social Studies to Massachusetts' (MA) 2018 Standards	Standards
Kentucky's Current Standard	Comparison from Massachusetts
<p>Many important personages are <u>totally ignored</u>. <u>Not one</u> of the important individuals listed to the right, all of whom are explicitly mentioned by name in the MA standards, appears <u>anywhere</u> in the proposed Kentucky Standards.</p>	<p>In Grade 5, MA requires students to <i>“Compare the different reasons colonies were established and research one of the founders of a colony (e.g., Lord Baltimore in Maryland, William Penn in Pennsylvania, John Smith in Virginia, Roger Williams in Rhode Island, John Winthrop in Massachusetts).”</i> (Pg. 72)</p> <p>Also in Grade 5, MA, requires students to <i>“Describe the origins of slavery, its legal status in all the colonies through the 18th century, and the prevalence of slave ownership, including by many of the country’s early leaders (e.g., George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, George Mason).”</i> (Pg. 72)</p> <p>Also mentioned at least once: Franklin D. Roosevelt (Pg. 132), Theodore Roosevelt (Pg. 127), and Dwight D. Eisenhower (Pg. 134), Martin Luther King, Jr. (Pg. 77)</p> <p>And, perhaps most intriguing of all for a school document, John Dewey (Pg. 127) is included in the MA standards but not in KY’s.</p>
<p>“American Revolution” not mentioned until Grade 5.</p>	<p>MA introduces in Grade 3. (Pg. 17)</p>
<p>“Bill of Rights” not mentioned until Grade 5.</p>	<p>MA introduces Bill of Rights in Grade 3. (Pg. 57)</p>
<p>“Declaration of Independence” and “American Revolution” not specifically mentioned until Grade 5.</p>	<p>MA introduces the declaration and the American Revolution in Grade 3. (Pg. 57)</p>
<p>“Constitution” first mentioned in Grade 5. However, the term “Constitutional Monarchy” first appears in Grade 3. (Especially interesting is a federal law, discussed on Page 9 of the Revised Standards, that requires instruction on the Constitution on September 17 of each year. It looks like most elementary school students will start that date clueless about what the teachers are talking about because the Constitution won’t be introduced to them until Grade 5.)</p>	<p>MA introduces the Constitution in Grade 3. (Pg. 57)</p>

Table 4	
Comparison of Kentucky’s Current Social Studies to Massachusetts’ (MA) 2018 Standards	
Kentucky’s Current Standard	Standards
Kentucky’s Current Standard	Comparison from Massachusetts
“New Deal” never mentioned.	MA covers “New Deal” in US History (Pg. 18)
No specific wars except for the French and Indian War, the American Revolution and the Civil War are mentioned until high school (there’s a vague reference to Protestant Vs. Catholic wars in Grade 7). The French and Indian War and the Revolution are covered in Grade 5 and the Civil War in Grade 8.	In sharp comparison, in MA many wars, some not even covered at any time in the proposed KY standards, are included in lower grades. Just a few examples: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • War of 1812 is covered in Grade 5 (Pg. 76) • Chinese Civil War covered in Grade 9-12 (Pg. 157) • Pequot and King Philip’s Wars in New England in Grade 5 (Pg. 56) • Various Israeli Wars (Pg. 158)
<p>Post-World War II conflicts are ignored. There’s no mention of “Vietnam” or the “Vietnam War” or other related terms like “Southeast Asian Conflict” in Kentucky’s draft. The “Korean War” is also never mentioned. The “Persian Gulf War” is similarly treated with silence as are the countries of “Iraq” and “Afghanistan.”</p> <p>This could prove particularly problematic because earlier wars such as World War II are mentioned. This implies more recent conflicts like Vietnam should be omitted. Again, if it isn’t in the standards, it cannot be evaluated on assessments.</p> <p>(Note: Page 8 mentions that a KY statute requires students to learn about Veterans Day. How’s this going to happen in lower grades when none of the wars most living vets ever fought are covered before high school?)</p>	<p>MA covers the Vietnam War (Pg. 134) and other areas such as Vietnamese immigrant groups. (Pg. 65) The Vietnam War is explicitly included with a lot of other detail about the Cold War Era in high school standards. (Pg. 61)</p> <p>MA includes a massive amount of references to Korea and the Korean War. (Pg. 133)</p> <p>MA covers the Persian Gulf War, too. (Pg. 160)</p>

Table 4	
Comparison of Kentucky's Current Social Studies to Massachusetts' (MA) 2018 Standards	Standards
Kentucky's Current Standard	Comparison from Massachusetts
Discussion of map skills and terms is incomplete. The only specific political capitals discussed are for the Byzantine and Aztec empires. Neither Frankfort nor Washington, D.C. are mentioned as capital cities. The Pacific Ocean is never mentioned.	<p>MA requires <u>first-graders</u> to:</p> <p><i>Use a map to identify the location of major cities and capitals (e.g., Boston, Massachusetts, Washington, D.C., Mexico City, Mexico).</i> (Pg. 40)</p> <p>MA requires fourth-graders to <i>locate and identify important physical features (e.g., Mississippi and Rio Grande Rivers, Great Lakes, Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, Gulf of Mexico, Hudson's Bay, Appalachian Mountains, Rocky Mountains, Sierra Madre, the Great Basin, Mojave, Sonoran, and Chihuahuan Deserts, the Yucatan Peninsula, the Caribbean Sea).</i> (Pg. 62)</p>
Calendars are never mentioned	MA requires first-graders to use a calendar. (Pg. 41)
"South America" and "Antarctica" are not mentioned.	MA requires second-graders to locate all the continents. (Pg. 46)
There doesn't seem to be any discussion of how to become a naturalized citizen.	In MA they <i>"Explain the different ways one becomes a citizen of the United States"</i> in Grade 8. (Pg. 107)
<p>There's no mention of the Mississippi or the Ohio rivers as a boundary for Kentucky.</p> <p>(Obviously, there's a problem with Kentucky's kids not knowing about the "Kentucky Bend" or "Notch" that the river forms, as well. Folks in Fulton County might not like this very much.)</p>	<p>MA fourth-graders must identify the Mississippi River (Pg. 62)</p> <p>(Will the students in Massachusetts know more about Kentucky's western border than the Bluegrass State's own kids know?)</p>
The term "Middle East" only appears in conjunction with ancient time periods such as 1300 to 1500 (HS.WH.CH.1). No discussion of the Middle East in modern time is presented, indicating such is not required.	MA's standards mention Middle East or Middle Eastern 19 separate times and include extensive discussion of many issues.
Famous inventors like Alexander Graham Bell and Thomas Edison are never mentioned.	MA mentions Bell, Edison and more in a Grade 9 to 12 standard (Pg. 126).

Table 4	
Comparison of Kentucky’s Current Social Studies to Massachusetts’ (MA) 2018 Standards	
Kentucky’s Current Standard	Comparison from Massachusetts
The terms “Atom” and “Atomic Bomb” and “Atomic Energy” and “Energy” are all totally absent.	MA discusses the Atomic Bomb and its implications in its World History Standard (Pg. 133). Energy in general is also discussed. (Pg. 137)
The term “Time Zone” never is mentioned. (KY has two of them, but our kids will get none of them!)	MA requires specific coverage about time zones in its Grade 7 standards (Pg. 100)
Introductory material points to statute that says: “public middle and high school’s curriculum shall include instruction on the Holocaust and other cases of genocide.” But, there’s no further mention of this legal requirement in <u>any</u> standards area. In fact, the term “Holocaust” never appears in any grade-level standards. How and when is this supposed to be integrated into the instruction? When can it be tested?	MA covers the Holocaust in Grade 9 to 12 standards. (Pg. 133)
The “Manifest Destiny” is never covered.	MA covers Manifest Destiny in Grade 9 to 12 standards. (Pg. 122)
The “Monroe Doctrine” is never covered.	MA covers the Monroe Doctrine in Grade 9 to 12 Standards. (Pg. 122)
The purchase of “Alaska,” and the term “Alaska” itself never appear.	MA requires fourth-graders to know about Alaska. (Pg. 62) MA also covers the purchase of Alaska from Russia in the same grade. (Pg. 63)
The “Louisiana Purchase” is never mentioned.	MA covers the Louisiana Purchase in Grade 5. (Pg. 75)
“Lewis and Clark” are never mentioned.	MA covers the expedition of Meriwether Lewis and William Clark in Grade 5. (Pg. 76)
The “Federalist Papers” are never mentioned.	MA Covers this in Grade 8. (Pg. 106)

While the listings in Table 4 are incomplete and intended only to serve as a few examples, even this condensed comparison provides good evidence that the Kentucky Revised Standards for Social Studies need to go back to the drawing board. Just adding in the massive number of missing historic personalities and events as well as determining the grade-sequencing when each will be covered is going to take a considerable amount of time.

It also must be understood that the comparison in Tables 4 is to highly regarded standards. But lest the reader believes that might set the bar too high for Kentucky, we also conducted a brief

comparison between Kentucky's and Mississippi's social studies standards, which also were revised in 2018. Mississippi traditionally has been regarded as a low-performing state for public education, so the comparison in Table 5 is perhaps even more concerning than Kentucky's disparity with Massachusetts.

Table 5 Comparison of Mentioned Historical Personalities/Items in Kentucky's 2019 Social Studies Standards and Mississippi's 2018 Social Studies Standards			
Name/Item	In KY?	In MS?	Comments
George Washington	Y	Y	
Samuel Adams	Y	Y	
Abraham Lincoln	N	Y	Lincoln was born in Kentucky but the state's standards never mention him.
Crispus Attucks	N	Y	First casualty of the American Revolution, Killed in Boston Massacre
John Adams	N	Y	
John Hancock	N	Y	
Mercy Otis Warren	N	Y	Mercy Otis Warren was a political writer and propagandist of the American Revolution.
Marbury v. Madison	N	Y	Marbury v. Madison, 5 U.S. 137, was a U.S. Supreme Court case that established the principle of judicial review in the United States, meaning that American courts have the power to strike down laws, statutes and some government actions that violate the US Constitution.
McCulloch v. Maryland	N	Y	McCulloch v. Maryland, 17 U.S. 316, was a U.S. Supreme Court decision that defined the scope of the U.S. Congress's legislative power and how it relates to the powers of American state legislatures. The dispute in McCulloch involved the legality of the national bank and a tax that the state of Maryland imposed on it.
Dartmouth College v. Woodward	N	Y	Landmark decision in United States corporate law from the US Supreme Court dealing with the application of the Contracts Clause of the Constitution to private corporations.

Table 5
Comparison of Mentioned Historical Personalities/Items in Kentucky's 2019
Social Studies Standards and Mississippi's 2018 Social Studies Standards

Name/Item	In KY?	In MS?	Comments
Worcester v. Georgia	N	Y	US Supreme Court vacated the conviction of Samuel Worcester and held that the Georgia criminal statute that prohibited non-Native Americans from being present on Native American lands without a license from the state was unconstitutional.
Eli Whitney	N	Y	Inventor of Cotton Gin (KY Standard mentions Cotton Gin, but not its inventor)
James Hargreaves	N	Y	Spinning Genny
James Watt	N	Y	Inventor of Steam Engine (KY Standard never mentions the Steam Engine)
Thomas Edison	N	Y	Electrical Inventions, Sound Recording, Motion Pictures, more
Bessemer Process	N	Y	First inexpensive industrial process for the mass production of steel from molten pig iron before the development of the open-hearth furnace.
Adam Smith	N	Y	Scottish economist, philosopher and author as well as a moral philosopher, pioneer of political economy and key figure during the Scottish Enlightenment, also known as "The Father of Economics" or " <u>The Father of Capitalism.</u> "
Karl Marx	N	Y	
Identify the reasons that the United States purchased Louisiana from France.	N	Y	"Louisiana" doesn't appear in KY's standards.
Lewis and Clark Expedition	N	Y	
Manifest Destiny	N	Y	
Mayflower Compact	N	Y	
Pre-Columbian Civilizations	N	Y	
Thanksgiving	N	Y	It's like the holiday and its significance are unimportant in KY's schools
Korean War	N	Y	Even the country of Korea is ignored in KY

Table 5 Comparison of Mentioned Historical Personalities/Items in Kentucky's 2019 Social Studies Standards and Mississippi's 2018 Social Studies Standards			
Name/Item	In KY?	In MS?	Comments
Vietnam	N	Y	Both the country and war the US fought there are important to Mississippi
Vietnam War	N	Y	Both the country and war the US fought there are important to Mississippi
Latin America	N	Y	
French-Indochina	N	Y	
Ronald Reagan	N	Y	
War of 1812	N	Y	
Mexican-American War	N	Y	
Opium War	N	Y	
U.S.-Filipino War	N	Y	
Russo-Japanese War	N	Y	
Boer Wars	N	Y	
Balkan Wars in Kosovo and Bosnia	N	Y	The countries of Kosovo and Bosnia are never mentioned in KY's approved standards.
The Gulf Wars	N	Y	

As you can see, a great deal more specific content is listed in the Mississippi standards than in Kentucky's.

Why did Kentucky's standard writers fail to include so much important content that other states clearly recognize as subject matter all students should learn?

In summation

The summary is simple: Kentucky's current standards for social studies are seriously deficient in their current form and need further development.

What can be done?

The enabling regulation for the Revised Standards is 704 KAR 8:060, which can be reviewed at any time by the Kentucky Legislature at the request of just one member of an appropriate committee. That committee could then vote to find the regulation and related standards

“Deficient,” which would send the package back to the Kentucky Board of Education for more work.

Citizens who want a better social studies program in Kentucky should contact their legislators – especially those who serve on the Interim Joint Committee on Education and the Administrative Regulation Review Subcommittee – to take that action. Information about these committees can be found in the Endnotes of this report.²⁵

If the legislature fails to act, it will be five more years before the standards come up for review (The standard review cycle is six years). However, if enough legislators get concerned about the standards, a revision can begin right away. Again, it will take a lot of informed citizen action to cause such a revision to occur.

In closing

The Bluegrass Institute recognizes that development of solid education standards is extremely hard work. However, those standards become the cornerstone around which the entire remaining elements of our education system are built, including our state assessments and curriculum, both of which are time-consuming and expensive to create. For these reasons and for the best interests of our students, the state’s social studies standards deserve as much time and attention as we can provide them. At present, the Revised Standards lean far too heavily on process and are woefully deficient in content, and some of the inconsistencies such as mentioning Washington and Jefferson but not Lincoln or King could create some very bad publicity for our commonwealth, as well.

Certainly, Kentucky will do its students a great disservice if the current standards continue in use.

— *Richard G. Innes is an education analyst for the Bluegrass Institute, Kentucky’s free-market think tank (www.bipps.org). Reach him at dinnes@freedomkentucky.com.*

Endnotes

- ¹ Kentucky Department of Education, “Kentucky Academic Standards, Social Studies,” July 2019. Online at: https://education.ky.gov/curriculum/standards/kyacadstand/Documents/Kentucky_Academic_Standards_for_Social_Studies_2019.pdf.
- ² The introductory material to the “Kentucky Academic Standards, Social Studies” says “The Kentucky Academic Standards for Social Studies is organized around the inquiry practices of questioning, investigating, using evidence and communicating conclusions.” Page 13.
- ³ Senate Bill 1, 2017 Regular Legislative Session is online here: <https://apps.legislature.ky.gov/recorddocuments/bill/17RS/sb1/bill.pdf>.
- ⁴ Houchens, Gary, “Kentucky teachers are being encouraged to use “inquiry methods” to indoctrinate students in Leftist attitudes,” August 31, 2020. Online at: <https://schoolleader.typepad.com/school-leader/2020/08/kentucky-teachers-are-being-encouraged-to-use-inquiry-methods-to-indoctrinate-students-in-anti-ameri.html>.
- ⁵ See, for example, Hambleton, Ronald K., et al., “Review of the Measurement Quality of The Kentucky Instructional Results Information System, 1991-1994,” Kentucky Legislative Research Commission, June 20, 1995. Pages A-4 to A-9. Online at: <https://legislature.ky.gov/LRC/OEA/Documents/MEASUREMENT%20QUALITY%20FINAL%20REPORT%2091-94.pdf>.
- ⁶ Senate Bill 1, 2017 Regular Legislative Session, Enrolled Version, Page 20. Online at: <http://www.lrc.ky.gov/recorddocuments/bill/17RS/SB1/bill.pdf>.
- ⁷ Howe, Daniel Walker; Lewis, Anders and Donovan, Bill, “Laboratories of Democracy: How States Get Excellent K-12 U.S. History Standards, The Pioneer Institute, Boston, Massachusetts, Page 21. Online at: <http://pioneerinstitute.org/download/laboratories-democracy-states-get-excellent-k-12-u-s-history-standards/>.
- ⁸ The Statement of Consideration is online at: <https://portal.ksba.org/public/Meeting/Attachments/DisplayAttachment.aspx?AttachmentID=476200>.
- ⁹ Kentucky Department of Education, “2018 Kentucky School Laws Annotated,” Complete to October, 2018, Page 872. Online at: <https://education.ky.gov/districts/legal/Documents/KY%20School%20Laws%202018%20Edition.pdf>.
- ¹⁰ Regarding the importance of factual knowledge for strong reading, see, for example, Pimentel, Susan, “Why Doesn’t Every Teacher Know the Research on Reading Instruction?” Education Week, October 26, 2018. Online at: <https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2018/10/29/why-doesnt-every-teacher-know-the-research.html>, and Willingham, Daniel T., “How to Get Your Mind to Read,” The New York Times, November 25, 2017. Online at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/25/opinion/sunday/how-to-get-your-mind-to-read.html>.
- ¹¹ KDE’s Social Studies web page is online at: <https://education.ky.gov/curriculum/conpro/socstud/Pages/default.aspx>.
- ¹² See the National Council for the Social Studies definitions here: <https://www.socialstudies.org/standards/execsummary>.
- ¹³ Shaara, Jeff, “A Blaze of Glory,” Ballantine Books, New York, New York, © 2012.
- ¹⁴ Per Page 20 in the Revised Standards, “The disciplinary clarifications include sample ideas of content and concepts to help teachers better understand the expectations of the standards. The identified disciplinary clarifications are possible suggestions; however, they are not the only pathways and are not comprehensive to obtain mastery of the standards.”

- ¹⁵ An interesting biography of Carver is online here: <https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/george-washington-carver>.
- ¹⁶ The 2018 Massachusetts History and Social Science Framework,” which is a Massachusetts Curriculum Framework and similar to what Kentucky calls “standards,” is online at: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/frameworks/hss/2018-12.pdf>.
- ¹⁷ Kentucky Department of Education, “STATEMENT OF CONSIDERATION Relating to 704 KAR 8:060, Kentucky Academic Standards for Social Studies,” Page 20. Online at: <https://portal.ksba.org/public/Meeting/Attachments/DisplayAttachment.aspx?AttachmentID=476200>.
- ¹⁸ The Woodrow Wilson Institute’s news announcement about US History knowledge across the states is online here: <https://woodrow.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/WW-AHI-50-State-Release-02.14.19-fnl.pdf>.
- ¹⁹ See, for example: <https://www.varsitytutors.com/earlyamerica/early-america-review/volume-4/the-battle-of-blue-licks>.
- ²⁰ Downs, R. & Heffron, S. (Eds.). Geography for Life: The National Geography Standards, Second Edition. Online at: <https://www.nationalgeographic.org/standards/national-geography-standards/>.
- ²¹ Kentucky’s newly adopted Kentucky Academic Standards - Reading and Writing for SY 19-20 are online here: https://education.ky.gov/curriculum/standards/kyacadstand/Documents/Kentucky_Academic_Standards_Reading_and_Writing.pdf.
- ²² Kentucky’s newly adopted Kentucky Academic Standards - Mathematics for SY 19-20 are online here: https://education.ky.gov/curriculum/standards/kyacadstand/Documents/Kentucky_Academic_Standards_Mathematics.pdf.
- ²³ “Report of the National Reading Panel: Teaching Children to read” is online here: <https://www.nichd.nih.gov/publications/pubs/nrp/smallbook>.
- ²⁴ Wong, May, “Stanford study on brain waves shows how different teaching methods affect reading development,” May 28, 2015. Online at: <https://news.stanford.edu/2015/05/28/reading-brain-phonics-052815/>.
- ²⁵ Information about the Interim Joint Committee on Education is found here: <https://legislature.ky.gov/Committees/Pages/Committee-Details.aspx?CommitteeRSN=29&CommitteeType=Interim%20Joint%20Committee>
- and the Administration Regulation Review Subcommittee information is found here: <https://legislature.ky.gov/Committees/Pages/Committee-Details.aspx?CommitteeRSN=3&CommitteeType=Statutory%20Committee>