



STATE OF ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF ARCHIVES AND HISTORY

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Steve Murray
DIRECTOR

January 25, 2021

2021 Social Studies State Course of Study Committee
c/o Alabama State Department of Education
P.O. Box 302101
Montgomery, AL 36130-2101

Dear Members of the Course of Study Committee:

The preparation of Alabama's next State Course of Study for Social Studies begins during a period of deep division over the direction of American government, racial and economic inequity, and the proper response to a global pandemic. The timing will make your work challenging, but it also underscores the importance of the decisions you will make. Your choices will shape the preparation of Alabama's K-12 students for future roles as voters, neighbors, and citizens. The standards you create will help advance young people's understanding of their rights in a free society, how to use those rights in advocating peacefully for the candidates and policies they support, and why it is important to find common ground with people whose opinions may differ from their own.

During our state's three-year bicentennial commemoration, the Alabama Department of Archives and History (ADAH) interacted extensively with classroom teachers from every public school system in the state as part of a series of intensive professional-development institutes. Those experiences reinforced our understanding that effective social studies instruction rests on a three-legged stool.

The object of your work, a strong Course of Study, provides one of those legs. Its sets expectations for the content and skills that students should master by the time they leave K-12 classrooms. A second leg consists of strong content mastery and classroom resources for teachers. These depend on the course requirements of our colleges of education, the quality and availability of professional-development opportunities, and the provision of good textbooks and other curricular materials.

The third leg of the stool is time—a commitment of significant amounts of time for social studies topics every day in the classroom. After decades spent emphasizing the subjects covered in standardized testing over others, reclaiming time for history and civics may be the

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most difficult challenge of all. It will take prioritization in policy, buy-in from school administrators, and follow-through by classroom teachers.

The unhealthy condition of our nation's politics is an indication that we must be about strengthening all three legs of the stool. An excellent target date for marking progress is on the horizon. In just five years we will commemorate the 250th anniversary of the nation. If we allow it to pass without showing improved commitment to social studies, our society will suffer further deterioration of the ties that bind us together as Americans.

I hope you will find the enclosed materials created by the ADAH to be useful to the Committee's work in addressing one of the three legs. They include a set of general recommendations applicable across all grades in the social studies standards, a mark-up of the 2010 standards with specific suggestions for edits and additions, and an overview ([online video](#) and PDF transcript) of resources made available by the ADAH to Alabama's public school, private school, and home school educators.

Please consider the ADAH to be a readily available resource for the Committee. Our staff will be pleased to answer questions regarding the recommendations and to provide feedback on points of discussion.

Thank you for your willingness to serve the state and its young people in this important task.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Steve Murray". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Steve Murray
Director