*****Massachusetts Department of***

***Elementary and Secondary Education***

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| Jeffrey C. Riley  *Commissioner* |  |

# MEMORANDUM

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| **To:** | Members of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education |
| **From:** | Jeffrey C. Riley, Commissioner |
| **Date:** | October 8, 2021 |
| **Subject:** | History, Social Science, and Civics Implementation Updates |

This memorandum updates the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (Board) on initiatives undertaken by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (Department) to support the implementation of the 2018 History and Social Science Framework and the student-led civics project requirement established by Chapter 296 of the Acts of 2018, *An act to promote and enhance civic engagement.*

**Executive Summary**

While there has been progress on implementation of the 2018 History and Social Science Framework and the student-led civics project requirement, districts need further support so that all students have access to high-quality history and social science education, including participation in a real-world civic action project. The Department is focused on providing resources and professional development for educators, including offering civics project workshops and expanding existing civics resources. Additionally, work is ongoing on Investigating History, a suite of comprehensive, Department-developed curricular materials for grades five, six, and seven that Massachusetts teachers are piloting this year for release beginning in June 2022.

**Background and Context**

2018 marked a milestone after years of Board and legislative effort to strengthen history and civics education in Massachusetts. On June 26, 2018, the Board formally adopted the 2018 History and Social Science Framework, which included a stronger focus on civics at all grade levels, content standards that reflect the diversity of the United States and world cultures, and new standards for History and Social Science Practice that aim to support inquiry-based instruction. Additionally, on November 8, 2018, Governor Baker signed [*An act to promote and enhance civic engagement*](https://malegislature.gov/laws/sessionlaws/acts/2018/chapter296), which, among other provisions, established a requirement that all public high schools and school districts serving eighth-grade students provide at least one student-led, non-partisan civics project for each student.

Since these landmark changes in 2018, the Department’s Center for Instructional Support has provided a range of resources and supports to schools, districts, and educators to help them implement the new framework and civics projects. While these policies are still relatively new, we have initial data about their implementation to date:

* **2018 History/Social Science Framework:** In June 2020, researchers from Boston University’s Wheelock College of Education and Human Development and Tufts University’s Tisch College of Civic Life surveyed classroom teachers and school and district administrators statewide to learn about their awareness, understanding, and implementation of the new framework.
  + 96 percent of teachers surveyed were aware of the 2018 framework and its key components.
  + However, only 44 percent of those educators could explain how the new framework would impact their instruction.
  + Follow-up interviews revealed that instructional practice still falls short of the vision laid out in the framework, with many educators not following the entire arc of student-led historical inquiry that anchors the framework’s Standards for Historical Practice.
  + Additionally, these interviews showed that many educators spend a significant amount of time and energy finding and/or creating curricular materials on their own.
* **Student-Led Civics Projects:** Chapter 296’s student-led civics project requirement went into effect statewide in the 2020-21 school year. End-of-year data reporting reveals that:
  + All or almost all eighth graders were provided with a civics project in 45 percent of schools.
  + All or almost all high school students in at least one grade were provided with a civics project in 30 percent of schools.
  + In 52 percent of schools serving eighth grade and 63 percent of schools serving grades 9-12, no or almost no students were provided with a civics project.

**Current History and Civics Initiatives**

As these early data illustrate, there is still work to be done. To this end, the Office of Literacy and Humanities within the Department’s Center for Instructional Support is pursuing a number of priorities focused on connecting educators with high-quality instructional resources and professional learning that are aligned with the state standards.

*Student-Led Civic Action Projects*

Throughout the 2021-2022 academic year, the Department will expand resources and support available to educators who are implementing the student-led civic action projects by:

* Offering varied, free professional development from the Department for civics project teachers, leveraging expert civics educators
* Expanding the Civics Project Guidebook with additional resources
* Creating a guide highlighting high-quality civics curricular materials as identified by a panel of Massachusetts civics educators
* Awarding over $900,000 in grant funding in spring 2021 to support civics project implementation, with anticipated additional grant funding opportunities later this school year
* Beginning long-term planning to create a network of regional civics professional development hubs based on a similar, successful model in Illinois

*Investigating History Curriculum for Grades 5, 6, and 7*

Beginning in spring 2020, in response to considerable feedback from schools and districts, the Department began developing [Investigating History](https://www.doe.mass.edu/instruction/hss/investigating.html), a suite of comprehensive, open-source 5th, 6th, 7th grade curricular materials that are fully aligned to the 2018 framework. This work aligns with the Department’s broader strategy, “Curriculum Matters,” to connect educators with strong instructional materials, based on research that expanding access to high-quality, standards-aligned curricular materials can significantly improve student outcomes, especially when teachers have the professional learning opportunities they need to make the most of those materials.

Given a lack of existing, high-quality offerings for middle school history, the Department took the unique step of developing its own curricular materials. This work is happening in collaboration with Primary Source, a Watertown-based vendor with more than thirty years’ experience in global education, as well as Educurious, a Seattle-based vendor that is developing accompanying curriculum-based professional development. The units developed will ultimately cover all the fifth-grade American history content standards as well as six of the nine topics in the sixth/seventh-grade world geography and ancient civilizations content standards.

Undergirding the materials are a comprehensive set of research-backed design specifications, (attached), which focus on the four key principles of **historical inquiry and investigation, historical empathy and human connections, civic engagement and current world relevance,** and **culturally affirming pedagogies.** As these materials address challenging topics in United States and world history, they are guided by the Department’s existing [guidance](https://mcusercontent.com/d8f37d1a90dacd97f207f0b4a/files/b5483181-6037-f5d8-7dc0-3e012e3cb095/Race_Racism_and_Culturally_Responsive_Teaching_in_History_and_Social_Science_in_MA_final.pdf) regarding the teaching of race and racism within history and social science. In particular, they emphasize a critical examination of multiple perspectives on historical events in keeping with Guiding Principle 2 of the framework, which states that effective history education “incorporates diverse perspectives…[and encourages] honest and informed academic discussions about prejudice, racism, and bigotry in the past and present.”

Draft materials have been developed in close collaboration with teacher advisors and scholar experts. During this 2021-2022 academic year, teachers in 18 schools and approximately 50 classrooms across the state are piloting the Investigating History units. Researchers from Boston University’s Wheelock College of Education and Human Development will be evaluating the pilot. Following the pilot, the Department anticipates releasing the Investigating History curricular materials starting in June 2022.

Heather Peske, Senior Associate Commissioner; Katherine Tarca, Director of Literacy and Humanities; Reuben Henriques, History/Social Science Content Support Lead; and N’Dia Riegler, history teacher at the Eliot School in Boston, will be present at the October 19 Board meeting to answer your questions.

Attachments: Investigating History Design Specifications