

DC STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION
Monthly Meeting
Wednesday, January 18, 2023

Testimony Presented by:
Sally Schwartz, Globalize DC

Good evening, members of the Board. Thank you for this opportunity to testify. I'm Sally Schwartz, Director of Globalize DC, a nonprofit organization that works to promote global education, language learning, and study abroad for DC public school students. We do most of our work in the out-of-school space, but there is no denying that what gets taught during the school day every day is most important in what students learn. This is why we are very interested in the revision of these social studies standards and why we are also very concerned about what may be a huge missed opportunity.

Around the year 2000 the field of global education experienced a fundamental shift. Before that time K-12 students of course learned about the world – primarily in world history and geography classes. But at the turn of the century, with increasing globalization, growing diversity in our communities and workplaces, and rapid technological advances (especially the internet), a new model emerged – one designed to infuse global content and perspectives across disciplines, across grade levels, and for all students in all schools. It is no longer about “us” and “the rest of the world” -- “us” and “them.” We’re too interconnected. We’re all “us.” As Martin Luther King, Jr said, we live in a “World House.” We can’t understand our own history, our current predicament, or solve our biggest problems unless we think and act globally. This approach has been widely embraced, by the US Department of Education, OECD, Council of Chief State School Officers, state offices of education, and this is the forward facing approach that the State Board of Education adopted when it called for an **explicit, ongoing thread around global content and perspectives** in its 2020 Guiding Principles resolution on the Social Studies Standards. It is extremely disappointing then that OSSE chose not to do this, despite the fact that there are a lot of global standards included. The draft identifies global anchor standards within the different disciplines - Geography, Government, Economics. But this doesn’t do the job. This is old framing. Probably the answer is for OSSE to add a global competence anchor standard within its inquiry arc.

There are other problems with the current draft, which I won’t have time in this testimony to go into in detail, but I’ll make note of the most important and can say more later.

Culture is not adequately addressed. Learning about culture – what it is; the diversity of world cultures and the importance of respecting difference; how to communicate and work across cultures; how to resolve cross-cultural conflict; the ways in which culture is transmitted, transformed, and connected to our history, our political and economic systems – is essential to educating for global competence.

The Grade 6 standards are extremely problematic, and in my view require a complete rewrite.

“Culture” has been removed from the title of this course and it should be restored. Beyond this, both the structure and content are not well developed and try to cover far too much material.

The draft suffers from inconsistency across grade levels and courses in terms of the specificity of content. Some standards are very specific and narrowly drawn; others (particularly in world history) are overly broad, generic.

We appear to devote much greater attention (and standards) to ancient history as compared to recent history. I think this needs another look and some recalibration.

World History II adopts a very constraining Eurocentric approach. There appears to be so much history left out or left to the discretion of the teacher or curriculum writer. I wonder what students will actually learn about South America, Africa, Asia, Europe (for that matter) beyond the Western expansionist, imperialist framing of the course. That is important content but it is also vital for students to understand that other countries have their own histories, complexities, and agency.

Finally, I want to again urge that the public comment period be extended to give community members adequate time to digest this complex standards document, to engage in real discussion, and offer thoughtful feedback. The end product will benefit from civic engagement, which of course is what we’re trying to teach our students through these standards. And in the area of social studies and global issues, DC has such a wealth of resources and real world expertise, not to mention careers pathways requiring global competencies. It seems foolhardy not to take full advantage.

Sally Schwartz, sally@globalizedc.org

Asia Society, with the Council of Chief State School Officers, created the Global Competence Framework which is widely used and adapted today. You can read much more and download their original report (free) at <https://asiasociety.org/education/educating-global-competence>.