

**DC STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION
Monthly Meeting
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**Written testimony presented by:
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What follows is my written testimony on the revision of DC's social studies standards. Thank you for providing a platform to share our views with members of the Board and with the public at large.

I want to begin by expressing my appreciation to the State Board of Education for your very thoughtful review of the draft standards (released 12/16/22), as well as to OSSE for its detailed response to the Board and to each of the public comments submitted by the 2/10/23 deadline.

Globalize DC's objective through this entire revision process has been to ensure that the new social studies standards adopt a 21st century approach to educating our students for global competence. Our DC students not only need to understand the world around them, but also to see themselves as actors in that world, equipped with the knowledge, skills, mindsets, and experiences that will prepare them to do so. This is the approach laid out in the Board's Guiding Principle on Global Perspectives, which OSSE's initial set of draft standards clearly did not prioritize. It was not even included in OSSE's description of its "Major Shifts to the Standards" in its presentation to the Board at its February 1 Working Session. We feel that global content clearly represents the weakest element of the revised standards, and we are urging SBOE to ensure this deficit is remedied before these standards are approved.

Why is it important that these standards incorporate strong global content, perspectives, and competencies?

I have been working in the global education field here in DC since I was a social studies teacher at Duke Ellington School of the Arts in the 1970s. There have always been great teachers across the city who have brought a global perspective to their practice, and have found ways to incorporate rich global content and experiences for their students, regardless of subject matter. There are also many great DC public schools that work intentionally to create a global culture, that value diversity, and incorporate global content, languages, and perspectives within their school communities. Not surprisingly, many, if not most, are schools with linguistically and culturally diverse student populations situated in more diverse neighborhoods. At the same time, I know there are many more teachers and schools which do not offer much in the way of global content and preparation for their students – for multiple reasons. Even though Washington, DC is a hub for many kinds of global careers, with a wealth of globally focused resources and expertise that could be tapped by our schools, most of our students do not benefit, and have very limited global exposure. Unfortunately, we still live with a pervasive attitude that global education, language learning, and study abroad is "not for some students."

Incorporating an explicit, ongoing global thread in the new social studies standards will ensure that all DC students, regardless of school or neighborhood, have the right to a global education. If, on the other hand, incorporation of global content is left primarily to the discretion of the LEAs or individual teachers, then current disparities will inevitably continue. This global framework must be embedded in the standards, as the Board's Guiding Principles resolution described.

On the positive side:

We are pleased to see that OSSE plans to make the following changes in response to public input:

- The wholly Eurocentric framing of the World History II standards will be discarded.
- Additional content about Asian Americans (and other immigrant groups) will be added to US and DC history standards. The students who testified from our #Stop Asian Hate Project are happy to see that, and I'm thrilled to see that their voices were heard.

So what will we be looking for in the next social studies standards draft?

1. **Specificity.**

We need much more specificity in the world history and geography standards, which are overly broad and lacking a coherent narrative. OSSE, in its response to public criticism, writes: "The revised standards move away from the content approach to social studies education and toward the critical historical thinking approach to social studies education." The authors argue that a thematic approach is preferable to memorizing dates and events, but this is a straw man argument. No one is arguing for rote memorization. The US-focused standards (US History, DC History, Government) are able to be very specific about what students need to learn and at the same time require higher order thinking and analytical skills. We deserve the same approach when dealing with global content.

It appears OSSE's solution to narrowing the unwieldy subject matter in global studies (Geography and World History) will be to adopt a case study approach. No one would consider using a state or region as a case study for understanding the United States in its entirety – nor should we do the same when teaching students about Africa, Asia, or any other part of the world. Yet we are using this strategy in Geography and World History. Teachers can pick and choose. Case studies can be useful exercises, but students need a narrative to understand the span of world history, and we need to offer rich content – not a grab bag of options. For example, students need to learn about apartheid, Israel and the Middle East, the Haitian Revolution, Mao and the Cultural Revolution and Tiananmen Square, the Rwandan genocide, PanAfricanism and negritude, Islamic Jihadism and fault lines in the Muslim world, the Vietnam War, the EU and NATO, COVID and other pandemics. These would be some of the many choices I would make. OSSE may make others. But they need to make choices – this should not be left to individual LEAs or teachers. The idea that in 2023 DC would intentionally adopt standards that do not provide students with a basic understanding of world history, geography, and current global issues is disturbing.

2. **A global competency framework.**

As a member of the Social Studies Standards Advisory Committee (SSSAC), and a witness before the State Board of Education, I have shared information about current trends in global education and specifically about the Global Competency Framework that has guided work in this field over the last 15 years. Rather than just learning **about** the world (as in geography or world history), thought leaders and education practitioners have come to recognize that students graduating in the 21st century will by necessity be operating in a culturally diverse and globally interconnected world, requiring the skills, mindsets, and experiences that will equip them to investigate the world, recognize diverse perspectives, resolve conflict, communicate ideas, and take action – in a global context. This is not so different from the need for students to understand diverse perspectives and identities in a local or national context, which is currently embedded in the draft standards.

To be the national model that OSSE wants these standards to be, it is essential that we adopt a global competence framework (as other states, the US Department of Education, OECD, and private education providers have already done). Based on my close reading of the draft standards and OSSE's remarks, it appears no one involved in the writing is aware of this work. Adopting a global competence approach does not require a radical rewrite. It does require widening the frame – looking at everything through a global lens. Digital literacy, civic engagement, human rights, environmental literacy, democratic principles, recognizing diverse perspectives and identities – all need to be approached as knowledge and skills that students will need to be able to apply in a global context (not just in the United States).

3. An explicit ongoing global thread.

SBOE's Guiding Principle on Global Perspectives called for "an explicit, ongoing thread that provides students with a global perspective and global context for their own lives, their history, and their society . ." Per SBOE's guidance, we expected to see global perspectives explicitly included in the anchor standards labelling system. It was not. We believe this change is essential in creating social studies standards that promote the kind of global thinking and reframing that we are expecting.

Beyond the grade levels devoted to global subject matter (World History and Geography), global content and context need to be embedded throughout the standards. But they are not, and the writers miss many opportunities and, in some cases, imperatives to do so. For example, OSSE's response to our suggestion that the standards incorporate more opportunities for students to learn about and engage with current global issues is to create a new, apparently separate Driving Concept in Grade 8 Action Civics related to global humanitarian crises and the Holocaust. But as for bringing a global lens to the rest of Action Civics, they write: "While issues are interconnected in a local, national and international level, this is beyond the scope of this course." I don't really understand the response, but I can say that our current reality is global and that a global lens should ALWAYS be applied in these standards. Our students need to learn about the world, to fully understand their place in the world, and to be prepared to confidently and knowledgeably engage with the world. A strand dedicated to a set of global problems is a positive, but it does not substitute for incorporation of global content and context elsewhere.

4. Culture.

There is a fundamental problem with the treatment of "culture" in the draft standards. I have objected strenuously to the elimination of culture in the title of the World Geography course. [I still believe the standards for this course are so flawed and disappointing that they require a total rewrite.] In response to pushes for more attention to culture (from myself and students in our #Stop Asian Hate Project), the OSSE response has been:

- "OSSE will not make specific revisions to the standards in response to these comments. The grade 6 global geography course is inclusive of global history and modern global events, through each standard students learn about different global cultures and events through the investigation of geographic data and patterns."
- And this: "While the study of culture is interesting and important, it is also important for students to understand the rich and diverse history of global civilizations beyond surface level study of different cultural practices and ensure that students have a nuanced understanding of global society."

These comments betray a particular way of viewing culture – as a “surface level” collection of “practices,” beliefs, and traditions that different groups possess and value, and may carry with them from place to place. But in a 21st century global competence framework, cultural competency is absolutely critical. It is not just a question of learning about different cultures, but understanding the ways in which culture represents ways people understand and live in the world, and the perspectives and experiences they bring to interactions in cross-cultural (i.e., global) settings. Understanding the ways in which culture is operationalized in the real world – locally, nationally, and globally – is essential knowledge for our students. Culture is a key element in the content knowledge, skills, mindsets, and experiences needed to gain global competence. The absence of this level of understanding of “culture” is a huge flaw in these social studies standards throughout. Even in the many instances where “identity” is highlighted, culture seems absent, and yet culture is a key part of an individual’s identity (separate from race, gender, nationality, etc).

Again, I must reiterate my own deep frustration with the inability to directly interact with OSSE as we engage with these draft standards. I have so many questions about how the writers made the decisions they did in regard to global content. We would love to be able to discuss, and help make connections to additional resources during this standards writing phase. But OSSE’s very limited public engagement policy has made all this impossible, and so we direct our comments to the members of the State Board of Education in the hope that you will convey these messages to OSSE.

In sum:

We believe the draft standards have a very long way to go in terms of their approach to global content and competencies, and its adherence to the Board’s own Guiding Principle on Global Perspectives. We urge you to review the soon-to-be released revised version of the draft standards carefully, paying attention to the problems outlined above. If there is any way we can be helpful to the Board in your own public engagement efforts, as a body or individually, please don’t hesitate to contact me.

Thank you for your attention to my multiple communications on this matter. This is really important, and will have huge ramifications for our city’s young people for years to come.

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