

Defining Quality Social Studies

The Social Studies Accelerator is at the heart of the movement to ensure that students have access to interdisciplinary social studies education that represents who they are and shapes our society. While there are broad efforts to rethink social studies across the nation to ensure it is reflective of the diverse perspectives and experiences in America, the field lacks a centralized knowledge base and clear definition of high-quality, culturally responsive, culturally sustaining content.

To begin addressing this gap, we worked together with social studies educators and experts across the country to draw upon existing frameworks to develop a definition of quality to reinforce with solutions providers and school systems as we accelerate the adoption of culturally sustaining social studies in schools.



How We Developed It

We worked in collaboration with our Advisory Committee and Teacher Advisory Group - an alliance of nine social studies content and curricular experts, including classroom teachers - to emphasize current trends in social studies education. It reflects a shift toward inquiry and project-based learning, civic engagement, and culturally sustaining instructional materials and resources.

We used contemporary, nationally recognized frameworks in social studies education to inform this definition, including:

- [College, Career, and Civic Life \(C3\) Framework](#),
- [National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies: Executive Summary](#),
- [Educating for American Democracy Framework](#), and
- [Center for Anti-Racist Education Framework](#).

Each member of the Teacher Advisory Group created their own definition of quality using these frameworks. Those definitions were then synthesized into one coherent and comprehensive statement that reflects what we know not only to be best practices but also the values that should be embodied by all social studies professionals.

How To Use It

CLASSROOM TEACHERS

Teachers, in planning lessons and units, can use this definition of quality to inform learning objectives, activities, and identify supplementary materials.

DEPARTMENT AND SCHOOL LEADERS

Department heads and school leaders can use this definition of quality to inform their observations and guidance to support social studies teachers as well as developing high-quality professional learning.

DISTRICT LEADERS

District leaders can use this definition of quality to inform the adoption and selection of social studies instructional materials and the ongoing support of professional learning offered at the district level.

The Social Studies Accelerator aims to amplify and connect leaders and leading practices across the PK-12 ecosystem. Our goal is to break down the silos that exist and create a new narrative that social studies education can be both high-quality and culturally sustaining.

Social Studies Accelerator's Definition of Quality

The Social Studies Accelerator defines quality education as having curriculum, instructional materials, and pedagogy that prepares students to become thoughtful and active contributors to a just, equitable, thriving society. Quality social studies fosters rigorous and meaningful education that results in the following learning outcomes/competencies:

Sustainability

Students will explore ways to support social, environmental, and cultural sustainability that honors indigeneity, sovereignty, and interconnectedness with each other and nature.

Open-Mindedness

Students will be exposed to historical truths that support the exploration of their identities and allow them to find connections between their own identities and the identities of those near and far.

Collectivity

Students will develop empathy and a sense of commitment to humanization as a way to achieve collective wellness, holistic thriving, and joy.

Inquiry

Students will engage in deep and compelling inquiry that centers curiosity, critical consciousness, and problem-solving.

Action

Students will learn to use their voices to participate in building a society that values justice, equity, and freedom for all.

Lifelong Learning

Students will become lifelong learners engaged in continuous learning about themselves, society, and the world.

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