

**The Ridgewood Public Schools SS 6-12
Curriculum and Program Review
*Five-Year Cycle 2017-2022***

**Social Studies Department Study Findings &
Recommendations June 4, 2018**

Social Studies Department Mission

The Ridgewood Public Schools Social Studies program empowers students to become responsible learners in the global community of the 21st Century. Our learners will interpret, analyze, and evaluate documentary source information from a multitude of authors and time periods as a means of conducting authentic, historically based research. Students versed in the Social Studies are active, informed, and empathetic individuals. Only through a deep understanding of the past can one appreciate the realities of the present and possibilities of the future. Our program encourages lifelong learning that reflects social and historical realities.

Social Studies Curriculum Study Timeline

- **Year One, 2017-2018: Program review, research, and recommendation.**
 - A committee of teachers and administrators researched best practices in the content area and reviewed the current program, student achievement, and perceptions of staff, parents, and students. The committee's recommendation is made to reaffirm or revise curricula and/or program.
- **Summer of Year One, 2018: Curriculum writing, revising, and reaffirmation.**
 - A committee of teachers and administrators develop new or revised curricula, research and recommend professional development and instructional materials to support implementation.
- **Year Two, 2018-2019: Implementation of new or revised curriculum and materials, with consistent professional development as needed.**
- **Years Three and Four, 2019-2021: Monitoring and revising as needed.**
 - Implementation continues. Achievement and feedback are monitored. Modifications are made if needed.
- **Year Five, 2021-2022: Begin to prepare for next study of department.**

Committee Members

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Standards Guiding Study

- Two sets of NJ Student Learning Standards guide Social Studies instruction in the State, one content-based (NJ 2014 SLS: Social Studies), the other skill-based (NJ 2016 SLS: Literacy in History, Social Studies, Science & Technical Subjects):

NJ 2014 SLS: Social Studies

- 6.1 US History: America in the World
- 6.2 World History/Global Studies
- 6.3 Active Citizenship in the 21st Century

NJ 2016 SLS: Literacy in History, Social Studies, etc.

- Reading: History/Social Studies (primary/secondary source analysis)
 - Writing (informational/explanatory; narratives; research to build/present arguments)
- NJ 2014 SLS: 21st Century Life & Careers and Technology are two additional sets of pertinent standards to the field.

Year-One Research Study Process

Chief Areas of Focus:

- Integrating Themes
- Interdisciplinary Connections (intra- and inter-department)
- Essential Questions
- Authentic Assessments
- Civics and Citizenship focus

Year-One Research Study Process

- **Integrating Themes Across the Curriculum: 2.17.17**
 - Professional Development Day: Presenter from Yad Vashem skyped with Grades 6-12 SS and ELA teachers to discuss implementing lessons that examine the roles of bystander, perpetrator, upstander and victim (each teacher received an *Echoes & Reflections* resource binder). Teachers worked in grade level interdisciplinary groups to brainstorm further related ideas for potential integrated units.
- **Essential Question Development and Implementation: 4.17.17**
 - Professional Development Day: Teachers reflected on the themes discussed in February and their own current teachings to craft questions that framed inquiry for student learning.

Year-One Research Study Process

- **Social Studies Department PDP goal established for next school year: 5.17**
 - In collaboration with same course colleagues, I will continue to identify methods for incorporation of the bystander/upstander/perpetrator/victim theme outlined during the February, 2017, *Echoes & Reflections* PD day within select unit design.
- **Interdisciplinary Themes Selection by High School ELA Leadership Team: 8.17**
 - Sixth: Diversity
 - Seventh: Community
 - Eighth and Ninth: Humanity
 - Tenth: Truth
 - Eleventh: Responsibility
 - Twelfth: Empowerment

Year-One Research Study Process

- **Grade level teams established for ELA/SS Curriculum review: 9.18.17**
 - Creation of course guiding essential questions relating to grade level theme.
 - Interdisciplinary teams formed with grade level high school ELA and Social Studies teachers who explored connections under the grade level theme during Enrichment mornings, September 2017-March 2018.
- **SS Department engages in norming assessment activities: 10.17.17 & 11.17.17**
 - Grade level cohorts focused on unit exams with elevated Depth of Knowledge questions that privileged historical thinking skills.
- **Grade level teams revised units of study on Rubicon: 10.18-6.18**
 - Grade level cohorts revised units of respective core courses with consideration of work on themes, interdisciplinary connections, essential questions, and authentic history assessment prompts in mind.

Year-One Research Study Process

- **Interdisciplinary Design Workshop: 2.1.18**
 - Articulation of interdisciplinary implementation with Problem-Based Learning and connecting themes with middle and high school ELA and Social Studies teachers from 16 different districts with over 70 teachers and administrators.
- **Parent, Student & Staff surveys distributed and data reviewed: 4-5.18**
- **Third Annual *Making a Difference* Spring lecture series: 2-5.18**
 - Five speakers focus on bystander/upstander/perpetrator/victim theme as they present personal stories.
- **BF Grade 7 & 8 trips to Museum of Jewish Heritage: 10.18**
 - Series of lessons on bystander/upstander theme culminate with visit to *Meeting Hate with Humanity* exhibit.

Year-One Research Study Process

- **Several collaborative/interdisciplinary projects were subsequently born from these earlier endeavors, including: 11.17-3.17**
 - *Ethnic Segregation in America Conference*: Human Geography and Contemporary Issues students led a three period workshop on the causes and effects of racial/ethnic segregation, and posited potential policy solutions to the dilemma.
 - *Reign of Terror and Night*: World History and English 9 CT classes were placed in a futuristic setting and tasked with rehabilitating a broken society.
 - *Mock Congress*: US I H and Crim/Const Law classes debated a series of five reform bills with genesis from the American antebellum period.
 - *Major League Baseball Expansion Project*: Human Geography and Global Economics students offered presentations supporting possible expansion locations, considering various economic, demographic, political, and infrastructure factors when attempting to convince MLB owners and the commissioner.

Year-One Research Study Process

- **Collaborative/interdisciplinary projects (continued):**
 - *Mock Trial*: Sections of HS Criminal Law and Grade 8 ELA placed Napoleon the Pig from *Animal Farm* on trial.
 - *Civics Engagement Symposium* (in planning stages): Student leaders from various SS classes frame a town hall debate on the validity of American exceptionalism in a flawed democracy.
- **Ongoing revisions and additions for curriculum writing: 5-7.18**

District Articulation & Best Practices

- **Research skills and paper process**

- Grades 6: Introduction and increased use of document-based analytical skills
- Grade 7: Use of specific textual and data-based evidence to support claims in context
- Grade 8: Scaffolded Document Based Questions (DBQs) to write thesis-driven essays
- Grade 9: Transition from scaffolded to holistic DBQ responses
- Grades 10 & 11: Required research paper productions, using U of Chicago citation

- **Historical thinking & elevated Depth of Knowledge (DoK) assessments**

- Highlighted at multiple HS department meetings and AM PD session, starting in 2015.
- Align formative and summative pieces with historical thinking principles recognized by the AP Board: historical causation; patterns of continuity & change over time; periodization; comparison; contextualization; historical argumentation; appropriate use of relevant historical evidence; interpretation; and, synthesis
- Fall HS SS dept meetings highlighted best practice test design and norming grading practices

District Articulation & Best Practices

- **Interdisciplinary seminar model**

- Interdisciplinary Curriculum Design and Implementation- Using integrated themes to connect ELA/SS subject areas. Current courses include: World Cultures & History; American Experience; AHLISA; American Studies; Senior Seminar
- Provide encouragement for teachers to experiment with innovative interdisciplinary lesson designs with peers, particularly outside the orbit of these pre-existing classes. (see earlier examples)

- **Oral proficiencies**

- Focus on civil discourse via debates, simulations, speeches, Harkness discussions, and other public speaking exercises.

Our SS Program Delivery

- **Core Program**

- SS 6 (US I)
- SS 7 (Our Place in the World)
- SS 8 (World History I)
- World History II (9)
- US History I (10)
- US History II (11)
- Elective(s) (12)

- **Enriched Program**

- History of the Modern World (9)
- American Experience (10 and 11 CP)
- American Studies (Honors 10 and 11)
- AHLISA (Honors 10 and 11)
- APUSH (10 or 11)
- AP Gov; AP Euro; AP Micro/Macro; AP Psych (11 or 12)

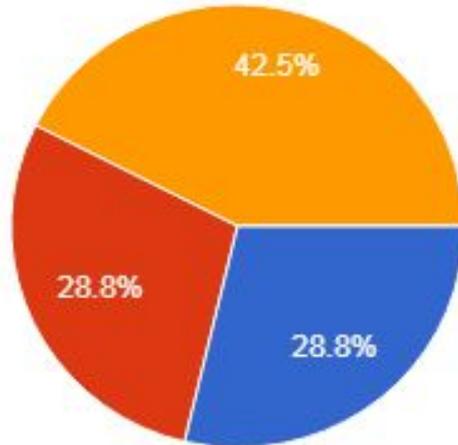
Benchmark Districts and Their Practices

- **Chatham:** New civics-based Grade 8 curriculum.
- **West-Windsor Plainsboro:** Interdisciplinary Grade 8 culminating [Global Challenges](#) project employing UN Sustainable Development goals.
- **Tenafly:** Parallel ELA/SS courses (Western Civ Humanities; Modern American Studies) and Civics courses (Contemporary Issues & Leadership I & II).
- **Hillsborough Township:** Replacing traditional finals with capstone projects featuring authentic audiences (i.e. National History Day; local museum partnerships; global issues initiatives).
- **NJ Social Studies Supervisors Association (NJSSSA):** Determine feasibility of [Seal of Civics Awareness](#).

Community Perceptions: Parent Survey Results

I am a parent or guardian with a child in

779 responses



- Benjamin Franklin Middle School
- George Washington Middle School
- Ridgewood High School

Parent Survey Results

Question	Strongly Agree	Agree	Total
My child has enjoyed his/her current SS class.	34.1%	50.2%	84.3%
To this point, my child has been successful in SS study.	38.8%	54.8%	93.6%
My child has been appropriately challenged in his/her current SS class.	28.8%	57.8%	86.6%
My child has an interest in SS study.	34.4%	52.2%	86.6%
I am satisfied with the SS program at my child's school.	30.2%	57.1%	87.3%

Parent Survey Comments

- **Positive Responses...**

- “My daughter talks about SS all the time and really seems to enjoy it. More so than I did at her age, which I attribute to a strong program.”
- “The teacher is engaging and demanding. She is teaching the students to be stronger writers via a history lens, which I value greatly.”
- “So, while the content is not always his favorite subject, these teachers have helped him appreciate his studies in history and motivated him to work towards his best!!”

- **Would like to see...**

- “Not enough time spent on bigger historical issues, too much on smaller less significant issues so time could be more efficiently spent.”
- “Politics need to be neutralized in the classroom. As divisive as it has become, it is not helpful to have a faculty member promote a particular view in the classroom.”
- “I think project based learning should be used more frequently. Additionally, our community can compliment the subject matter.”

Student Survey Results (346 responders)

Question	Strongly Agree	Agree	Total
I have enjoyed my SS experiences at RHS.	29.5%	38.7%	68.2%
I have been successful in my SS classes at RHS.	26.9%	50.6%	77.5%
I have been appropriately challenged in my SS classes at RHS.	34.7%	48%	82.7%
On the whole, my SS classes have connected what we are learning to real world experiences.	27.7%	42.8%	70.5%
On the whole, my SS classes have connected what we are learning to other subject areas.	13.6%	44.5%	58.1%

Student Survey Results (cont.)

Question	Extremely Satisfying	Satisfying	Total
I would rate my experiences in SS at my Middle School as:	18.8%	50.3%	69.1%
I would rate my experiences in SS at RHS as:	23.1%	50.3%	73.4%

High School Student Survey Comments

Briefly describe your favorite SS experience from either MS or HS to this point:

- “HMW and AP Gov...both classes were very discussion based and taught me a great deal about public speaking and coming prepared for debates.”
- “A video project on feudal Japan in 8th grade.”
- “One memorable project in middle school was the medieval mixer, in which we studied a certain occupation from the middle ages and then created our own outfit and props to go with it. We also had a project about creating a social media page for a historical figure in ancient times, which was loads of fun. In high school, the height of my social studies experience was during the mock congress debate; my group was assigned to affirmative action, and it was fun doing the research to defend our bill.”
- “In eighth grade for a project I researched the mythology of ancient Rome, Egypt, and Japan and I thought it was really fun to learn about 3 different religions in one project.”
- “The course materials in Sociology such as the documentaries, projects, and textbook was inspiring and academically challenging. I liked how the class encouraged looking at the world from multiple perspectives because it created a safe environment for students to raise diverse questions and comments.”

High School Student Survey Comments

Briefly describe your favorite SS experience from either MS or HS to this point:

- “I enjoyed writing a DBQ about philosophy’s role in totalitarianism, in which I got to research extremely interesting philosophical topics.”
- “I enjoyed the medieval and ancient history part of the history curriculum in middle and liked the connection of history to the real world made during high school.”
- “We did this great project in my 8th grade social studies class at BF where we wrote and performed a song about the four ancient Chinese dynasties. As a musician, it was awesome to do a project which incorporated two of my interests and I really enjoyed it.”
- “We talked with a Marine Corps Veteran who is now a boxing coach in Newark. He really opened our eyes.”
- “I am in the AHLISA program and absolutely love how art and culture is incorporated into our lessons. This makes it much more interesting and exciting to learn about.”
- “In middle school, we had to do a docu project, and I really loved the creative freedom as well as the exciting atmosphere we were learning in.”
- “I like my social studies experience sophomore year because we listened to *Hamilton* and that made me want to learn more!”

High School Student Survey Comments

Briefly describe one aspect of your SS experience from either MS or HS to this point that you would change if you could:

- “I would like to have review before tests. We hardly ever review the topic before the tests and I feel kind of unstable doing it on my own because there is always the possibility that I could get a certain aspect of it wrong.”
- “I wish that I would have put more time into my research paper in US1 H.”
- “I wish eighth grade provided us with a better connection and transition to freshman year.”
- “A much better method to accommodate different types of learners. Usually, lessons are usually a lecture or discussion format, and it is really hard for visual learners to follow. Also, decentralization of content is challenging to organize and study for tests.”
- “Not learning material in class (only from homework readings); receiving grades months after handing in assignments/taking tests; being graded on participation.”
- “I was often bored in middle school history and felt as if I wasn’t being challenged. This is not the fault of the teachers, however; they did their best to accommodate students who learned at a range of paces. This was more of a structural problem due to the fact that there were no advanced middle school classes.”

High School Student Survey Comments

Briefly describe one aspect of your SS experience from either MS or HS to this point that you would change if you could:

- “If I was able to get more feedback on my writings, such as essays and responses.”
- “I feel like notes from class do not align with tests AT ALL. It is very hard to study for a history exam and a lot of teachers expect students to interpret and infer things. Tests do not accurately reflect class time. I wish more current events were discussed as well. Personally, I LOVE current events.”
- “I wish I could tell myself to focus on study methods and organization. Transition from middle to high school was extremely rough in terms of workload. I was not prepared for the amount of material I'd have to handle and memorize while juggling work from other classes.”
- “Please incorporate more debates in classes.”
- “Some of the test materials from social studies at RHS is kind of subjective and vague (especially the multiple choice questions). Some of the history classes were huge and it made it so that it was hard to have ‘discussion based’ classes.”
- “Covering more modern topics and political issues to keep students well informed.”
- “Pacing of material; full syllabus was rarely completed.”
- “I've learned about the Industrial Revolution like 4 different times.”

High School Student Survey Comments

Provide any comments or feedback regarding the Social Studies program in the Ridgewood Public Schools:

- “Just to encourage all opinions, no matter how controversial, as long as it hurts no one. It can be annoying studying only one side of the story without recognizing the hardships and perspectives of the other side. By understanding both sides of an argument, one's critical thinking and own personal beliefs can develop more efficiently.”
- “Instructions on what a great, good, and bad DBQ is, more time on DBQ, no one period DBQ.”
- “Even though notes are important for history, small projects and activities are equally as important because you will actually remember the information and be engaged in class vs zoning out taking notes.”
- “The humanities are very strong at RHS. Being in advanced history classes fostered my love of politics and has inspired me to pursue political science as a major in college. The teachers I've had have always been encouraging, engaging, and compassionate. Thank you RHS History department!!”
- “All of the history teachers that I have had do a very nice job teaching the material keeping class interesting and trying to make it relevant to our generation and today's society.”

SS MS/HS Staff Survey Results (30 Responders)

Question	Strongly Agree	Agree	Total
My students have a high level of interest in SS.	33.3%	56.7%	90%
SS Education is a high priority to Ridgewood Public Schools.	36.7%	46.7%	83.4%
The SS Department has the resources it needs to provide a high quality education to all students.	43.3%	40%	83.3%
I routinely incorporate interdisciplinary connections into my instruction.	26.7%	53.3%	80%
I routinely connect what I am teaching to real world experiences and events.	66.7%	30%	96.7%
I routinely collaborate with my colleagues to articulate standards, skills, concepts and assessments.	46.7%	50%	96.7%

Staff Survey Comments

Provide one aspect of our SS program at your building level that you are most proud of:

- “I am very proud that we work together to add new elements of instruction to our programs. Examples of this include problem-based learning activities and Harkness discussions. We have flexibility to incorporate many types of creative projects and assessments which is an added bonus.”
- “Our team taught interdisciplinary programs: AmEx, AmStud, AHLISA.”
- “I think the diversity of our course offerings and the strong enrollment in our various electives speaks volumes to the commitment of our staff to provide so much more than just the required history courses, etc.”
- “Sharing ideas between grade levels, student-led learning, and growth mindset approach.”
- “This year's focus on interdisciplinary activities. There have been number of Social Studies teachers who have worked together on creating lessons.”
- “The MAD Speaker Series.”
- “The creativity seen in Social Studies teachers' efforts to engage students in history and current events. it takes a lot of hard work to get students excited about many of the content topics, and the fact that they do is a testament to the quality of teachers in the building!”

Staff Survey Comments

Provide one aspect of the RPS SS program at your building level that you believe is in most need of attention to change:

- “Better articulation between grade levels.”
- “More emphasis on research and writing in all grades so the students are not at a severe disadvantage by the time they write the 5-7 pg junior term paper.”
- “Time to collaborate with colleagues to develop interdisciplinary work.”
- “Prioritizing real word application over historical content.”
- “The Introduction to Research course in 9th grade should be reinstated to facilitate the development of the requisite skills to conduct research and write a research-based paper.”
- “If we could develop a departmental program, activity, or challenge where students from different levels of high school Social Studies can work together to produce authentic work and simulate an authentic activity (e.g. governmental committee, legal proceeding, policy meeting, etc.) to tie their skill-set together. This could be done interdisciplinary as well, given the correct participants. If not at RHS, perhaps this could be down between 8th/9th grade World History I/II students between RHS and GW/BF and could serve both academic and bridging-the-gap purposes between the middle/high school(s). This would be a really complex program to plan and launch, but it could be extremely worthwhile.”

Staff Survey Comments

Any additional feedback you would like to provide regarding the SS program:

- “Can civics be incorporated on multiple grade levels through RPS?”
- “I think this department maintains the appropriate balance between academic rigor and appropriate differentiation for learners of all backgrounds. I also think this department collaborates extremely well, but without becoming a rigid or inflexible group that is unwilling to allow/encourage individuals to branch out and experiment with new methods, curriculum, practices, etc. I think that as a result, our department is creative, dynamic, flexible, fluid, and most of all, innovative.”
- “There needs to be more consistency with the instruction of primary source activities and emphasis on writing activities throughout all the high school grades. When many of us spend a lot of time utilizing primary and secondary sources and writing activities with one grade and then the next does not participate in any kind of class activities or consistent writing assignments, all of the hard work is for nothing.”
- “The 8th grade curriculum is difficult to complete within the given time frame.”
- “For more collaborative time during enrichment mornings beyond Rubicon.”
- “Very happy to be a member of the RPS Social Studies team!”

Student Achievement Data (%3-5 AP scores)

Subject	2015		2016		2017	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
American History	45	96%	42	95%	22	100%
Psychology	98	99%	143	90%	122	89%
Macro Economics	111	72%	86	79%	121	59%
Micro Economics	110	76%	89	81%	117	62%
American Government & Politics	64	41%	63	59%	48	81%
European History	35	60%	38	76%	21	52%

Work Planned for Summer 2018

Middle School

- **Core Curricula to be revised:**
 - Social Studies 6: Transition from a conventional US I to a Civics-based course
 - Social Studies 7: Infusion of the Brown Choices Program
- **Elective Curriculum to be revised:**
 - AP Human Geography: Extension of popular CP/H interdisciplinary program

Recommendations

- **Continue interdisciplinary approach**

- Maintain and extend intra and inter departmental seminars for MS/HS students.

- **Civics & Citizenship**

- Develop Social Studies 6 program as civics-based examination of US History
- Continued support for extra curricular clubs with this focus- Teen Leads; Students Demand Action; etc.
- Continue relationship with the Network for Responsible Public Policy (NRPP)
- Examine feasibility of Pillar of Excellence in Citizenship

- **Thematic Units**

- Connect grade level themes devised by HS ELA leadership team to corresponding SS courses.

- **Authentic Assessments**

- Continue to privilege historical thinking skills, using content for context.

Special Thanks

Thank you to:

- 6-12 Social Studies teachers for their daily professionalism, diligence, collegiality, and willingness to take intellectual risks.
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