

Minority report of the social studies standards review committee

April 5, 2017

To: The members of the Tennessee Board of Education

From: Bill Carey, member of the Social Studies Standards Review Committee

Part One: Why I voted against many of the standards

I voted against many of the social studies standards that were approved by a majority of the social studies standards review committee. Specifically, I voted against the standards for grades 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5.

I think the committee and the board and Department of Education staff—especially Sara Morrison, Laura Encalade, Leigh Cummins, Nathan James and Kadie Patterson—worked diligently, and I commend the work that they have done and the professionalism that they showed through this process. I also want to praise Jason Roach and Freddy Curtis for keeping our committee on task and civil, in spite of the many heated discussions. However, I voted against the standards for grades 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 for main reason that, in my opinion, Tennessee history was deleted far more than the general public, most teachers, members of the General Assembly and the governor would have wanted.

About 17 years ago, Tennessee scraped its long-standing practice of having focused Tennessee history courses in grades 4 and 7 in favor of a system under which the state's history was "embedded" into U.S. history classes in grades 1, 4, 5, 8 and 11. At that time, the Board of Education and Department of Education told the General Assembly that, under this system, Tennessee history would not be de-emphasized.

Under the "embedding" system, students would learn about westward migration, John Sevier, William Blount, the Donelson Party, the Chickamaugan Indians, the Battle of Kings Mountain, etc. when they learned about U.S. history during the American Revolution in grades 4 and 8.

Students would learn about topics such as the New Madrid Earthquakes, the Chickasaw Purchase and the arrival of steamboats and railroads into Tennessee when they learned about the early 1800s in grades 4 and 8.

Students would learn about the Battles of Fort Donelson, Stones River, the Battles of Chattanooga, etc. when they learned about the American Civil War in grades 5 and 8.

However, for this system to work, **Tennessee topics have to be clearly spelled out in the standards.** If it is not, "embedding" won't work, because teachers won't get the clear message that they have to cover the Tennessee history topics. If these topics

aren't in the standards, we need to go back to a system where we teach focused Tennessee history.

These 250 pages of standards would theoretically replace 350 pages of standards, and both documents are very complex. It is also wrong to pull out a single item and make a big deal of it. However, **it is my opinion that we are deleting so much Tennessee history that we are no longer “embedding.”** Not only are there many subjects that used to come up twice now only come up once, but here is a partial list of subjects that are entirely deleted from this set of standards (the mandatory classes):

- * William Blount
- * Rocky Mount
- * Little Carpenter
- * the Chickamaugan Indians
- * the Donelson Party Journey
- * Thomas “Big Foot” Spencer
- * the Battle of the Bluffs
- * the Treaty of the Holston
- * the New Madrid Earthquakes of 1811-1812
- * David Crockett’s contributions to Tennessee history (but not his contributions to Texas history, which remain)
- * the Natchez Trace
- * the Cumberland Plateau
- * why Nashville was chosen to be the state capital
- * Elihu Embree, Nashoba
- * the development of railroads in Tennessee
- * the Civil War Battles of Chattanooga
- * the Battle of Franklin
- * the Battle of Nashville
- * Confederate hero Sam Davis
- * WSM radio
- * World War II aviator Cornelia Fort
- * Estes Kefauver
- * Alex Haley, and the list goes on.

In the proposed standards, the Plateau of Tibet is mentioned twice, but the Cumberland Plateau is never mentioned. The Great Lakes are mentioned, but Reelfoot Lake is not. Fifth graders learn about the Harlem Renaissance in the 1920s, but not about the rise of the Grand Ole Opry during that same era.

John Sevier is mentioned one time: in a small third grade Tennessee history unit moved from fourth to third grades (the movement of this material from fourth to third grade may have been the number one subject of debate within our committee). So, when fourth and eighth graders learn about early U.S. and Tennessee history, they will not be required to learn about Tennessee’s first hero and Tennessee’s first governor!

Furthermore, these standards are in many cases less detailed than the ones they replaced. Examples:

- * Compare current standard 4.2 (a detailed and popular standard about Cherokee culture) to the one that replaces it (3.17), which makes a brief mention of the word “Cherokee” along with other American Indian tribes.
- * Currently, first graders learn all four of Tennessee’s major cities as part of their Tennessee geography unit. Under the new plan, first graders would learn one city (that being Nashville). Memphis would no longer be required learning material in the first grade “Tennessee unit.”

If these proposed standards are adopted, Tennessee will no longer teach its history, geography and culture to the degree that other states such as Virginia, Georgia, North Carolina, Texas and Louisiana do. This is why people and organizations such as state historian Dr. Carroll Van West, the Tennessee Historical Society’s Ann Toplovich and the Tennessee Historical Commission are against these standards. Historic sites from the Carter House in Franklin to Chickamauga National Battlefield to Rocky Mount will be hurt by these standards

Not to state the obvious, but for Tennessee to adopt these standards at a time when it is building a new state museum makes no sense.

“At the end of the day I’m certainly hopeful that they can leave some time to focus on Tennessee history,” Governor Haslam said in October, when he expressed concern that too much Tennessee might be stripped from the standards through this process. I fear that these standards ignore his sentiments.

Part Two: Recommended courses of action

I understand that social studies standards needed to be trimmed because the standards passed five years ago were too much and, in some cases, not grade appropriate. So I do want to emphasize that I think that a lot of what came out of this process was good. That’s why I voted for the proposed standards for Kindergarten, grade 6, grade 7, grade 8 and all the high school classes.

Several months ago I asked my committee to either embed Tennessee history or “carve” out a year of focused Tennessee history, civics and geography (call it “Tennessee Studies” if you will). I did research into this subject and contacted 14 states, including Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Arkansas, Kentucky, Ohio, West Virginia, Texas and Pennsylvania (see enclosed sheet). Many of these states devote all of fourth grade to this topic.

If state history means this much to other states, why can’t we do that here?

Three points about the idea of turning fourth grade into a “Tennessee” grade:

- * If we create a “Tennessee Studies” course in fourth grade or fifth grade, we have the challenge of what to do with the other grade, since fourth and fifth are currently partnered. I have two suggestions: One, to turn the other year into civics in the fall and geography in the spring. A second idea is to turn the other grade into a basic, elementary-grade level U.S history course which (admittedly) would have to move faster than the current one, but could hit the higher points of early settlement, the American Revolution, Civil War, etc.
- * There is, in the proposed standards, some Tennessee history “embedded” into grades 8 and 11—not as much as I wanted, but still some. Even if we create a fourth or fifth grade “Tennessee Studies” class, I would argue that most of this needs to stay in grades 8 and 11, because I still believe that U.S. history should be taught in a way that explains our story and connection to it as well. Furthermore, there are some topics (the Trail of Tears, details of Civil War battles, the Coal Creek Wars, etc) that can be more clearly and vividly taught in grade 8 or 11 than grade 4.
- * This plan would alleviate the confusion that has surrounded the world of Tennessee history since the advent of the “embedding” system. If everyone knows that fourth or fifth grade is the “Tennessee” grade, it will help every historic attraction in the state carve out and target its education program. That’s why all the key education members of the Tennessee State Museum have told me that they would love to return to a year of focused Tennessee history.

The only alternative to this “stand alone” idea is for my committee to go back in and try to “re-embed.” But I think **the events of the last 10 months prove, once and for all, that solely “embedding” does not work and that it has confused and frustrated teachers more than its original creators foresaw.**

Thank you for allowing my input. I will do everything possible to help improve this process and will continue to devote my life to helping public school students learn about their great state and great country.

Sincerely,

Bill Carey