

ANCHORAGE SCHOOL DISTRICT
ANCHORAGE, ALASKA

ASD MEMORANDUM #300 (2004-2005)

May 9, 2005

TO: SCHOOL BOARD

FROM: OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

SUBJECT: SEVENTH AND EIGHTH GRADE SOCIAL STUDIES
CURRICULUM AND TEXTBOOKS ADOPTION

RECOMMENDATION:

It is the Administration's recommendation that the School Board approve and adopt the revised curriculum and materials for seventh and eighth grade social studies.

PERTINENT FACTS:

An ad hoc committee of middle school social studies teachers, facilitated by social studies coordinator Steve Ex, began meeting approximately two years ago in order to review existing curriculum. Community concerns about the existing eighth grade curriculum, "exploring social sciences", were articulated by the administration and middle school principals. A survey of middle school teachers, along with research pertinent to middle school social studies curriculum around the nation, highlighted a lengthy consideration of the strengths and weaknesses of our existing middle school curriculum. The committee ultimately decided in favor of revising the eighth grade curriculum to focus on U.S. history with a strong civics component, and to retain world geography in seventh grade.

Ninth and tenth grade history teachers, as well as intermediate elementary teachers, were brought in to address vertical alignment issues. The content overview between fourth and tenth grades was examined, resulting in proposed changes (Attachment A). Intermediate elementary teachers in ASD's Teaching American History federal grant program, "Project Clio", saw the need to teach Alaska history within the context of early civilizations and U.S. history in fourth through sixth grades. Elementary and secondary committees saw this as an improvement in Alaska studies K-8. They agreed that seventh grade world geography should continue to include Alaska geography.

Committees also concluded that seventh grade could strengthen the foundation for world history in ninth grade by including a study of two ancient civilizations associated with a unit on the geography of the corresponding region of the world. That global context in seventh grade broadens student knowledge of the world, and sets the stage for a deeper exploration of U.S. history in eighth grade. The proposed eighth grade curriculum seeks to strengthen historiography skills and understanding of U.S. history beginning with world exploration, studying colonization, revolution, the new nation, expansion and reform up to mid-nineteenth century. The explicit civics emphasis coincides with studies of the formation of our government, and should contribute to creating informed individuals with a strong sense of civic responsibility.

Middle school committees are developing curriculum guides following the Wiggins & McTighe model of backward design. Pacing, enduring understandings and essential questions are included (Attachment B). The special education and social studies coordinators have collaborated to identify a committee to develop appropriate modifications of the regular education curriculum.

In the near future, assessments and model units/lessons will be written to complete the curriculum guides. The goal is to provide the tools needed for more consistent learning around the District and to support new and new-to-grade-level educators. Upon approval of this curriculum, professional development will begin this June at ASDTA and with credit courses in the fall. Project Clio is reinventing itself to include eighth grade.

The committees have recently gone through an extensive process to screen instructional materials, view publisher presentations on selected materials, review those various texts and so forth within their buildings, and reconvene to make recommendations to the Board for adoption in support of the proposed curricula (Attachment C). An ESL committee participated in a review of materials pertinent to that program, and their recommendations are included.

The middle school executive director and principals have heard presentations on the curriculum and materials, have provided pragmatic suggestions for success in the schools, and support the proposed curriculum and materials. The Anchorage Council of PTAs and the Minority Education Concerns Committee have been briefed on the proposed curriculum.

In the future, intermediate elementary social studies will also need to be revised in order to strengthen literacy skills, support more effective studies in geography,

historiography and history, economics, civics and to create a more coherent elementary social studies program. That elementary process is starting at this time. The high school teachers, having closely collaborated with middle schools, are now working to complete their own curriculum documents in support of a revised and improved history program at ninth and tenth grades.

CC/JC/EH/SE

Prepared by: Enid Hunter, Executive Director, Curriculum/Instructional Support
Steve Ex, Social Studies Coordinator

Approved by: Jan Christensen, Assistant Superintendent, Instruction