

To: School District Administrators
From: Kate Gross, President Central New York Council for the Social Studies
RE: Implementation of the NYS Social Studies Framework and Toolkit
Date: March 2016

As you are aware, NYSED spent the last three years revamping standards and preparing for new assessments in Social Studies K-12. This process was exhaustive, with many stakeholders participating, especially practicing teachers. The work began as an alignment of social studies to the objectives of the Common Core, but in the process, teachers also strongly advocated for the incorporation of the C3 Framework, a national movement that contextualizes the CCLS to our discipline and adds the concept of “civic readiness” to that of “college and career” as necessary preparation for life after graduation. This led to the C3’s involvement in the creation of a “Toolkit” that demonstrates the manner in which the Framework can be implemented with an emphasis on inquiry-based instruction and the use of disciplinary sources and argumentation. The Framework, Toolkit and the emphasis in each on skills and content inform the creation of new regents exams, scheduled to be administered in 2018 and 2019. NYSED has provided content and pedagogical resources for teachers to transition away from content coverage and toward a curriculum that is vertically-articulated and features the more intentional use of social studies practices/historical thinking skills. The Toolkit, in particular, models at every grade level the sources, tasks, compelling questions and projects that move us towards the right standards - not just in social studies, but in all of education.

CNYCSS has been proud to participate in this process in a number of important ways: through our members’ direct input on the Framework, specific board members’ participation in the creation of the Toolkit, and through the continued presence of Professor John Langdon of LeMoyne College on the assessment design team at NYSED. With our advocacy efforts and the diligent application of our expertise, we are proud that the new standards are robust and reflective of the most current thinking in social studies education. Our students will be engaged, informed, and compassionate global citizens as a result of the rich experiences that await them in classrooms that have made these important shifts. Not only will reading, writing, listening and speaking be maximized, but students will have acquired strong analytical skills while also practicing civic mindfulness in authentic ways.

The changes are very exciting, but not without some understandable anxiety about the best approaches to implementation. Thus far, the Framework and Toolkit are well-received by teachers; that enthusiasm wanes when concerns are raised about the pending tests and teacher expectations embedded in APPR. The full benefits to students will not be attained unless there is a total commitment to bringing the standards off of the page and into the classroom. Given this, CNYCSS strongly urges school administrators towards the following recommendations:

A. The NYS Framework needs to be included as a stand-alone curricular component at all levels, K-12. First and foremost, this is in accordance with Commissioner’s regulations and all accompanying NYSED policy. Social studies instruction is vital to meeting the needs of the Common Core, but it also carries with it content specifications and skill sets that must be taught uniquely in social studies. K-6 teachers have not met their obligations in the classroom if their portion of the Framework is not included in meaningful and intentional instruction. The new assessments given at grades 10 and 11 rely on the continuous cultivation of skills and content knowledge from the early grades. Likewise, 7-12 teachers must not simply cover content, but are obligated by the design of the new Framework to practice the

reading, writing, speaking and listening skills that are necessary for success in Common Core literacy. The significance of social studies as a discipline is widespread, and must be given equal weight as such at every grade level.

B. The Toolkit contains resources and instructional practices that will be critical to success on new exams and should be utilized in classrooms. The Toolkit was designed with every intention of being a starting point for shifting instruction in social studies, but not scripted “modules” to implement part and parcel. Instructional teams should examine the contents of the Toolkit at this point to determine ways that the various components could be used to enhance instruction. The Inquiry Design Model, at the core of the Toolkit, serves as the chief vehicle for shifting instruction away from content coverage and toward skills and work with disciplinary sources. As it is now being understood, the Grade 10 and 11 assessments will be source-driven and will ask students to write argumentative essays around enduring issues, not specific “facts.” Proper preparation for this involves the inquiries. Teachers must work with these changes and plan for intentional implementation of the provided inquiries, as well as the design of additional inquiries to use with students.

C. Teachers need investments in time and professional development. The transition to the new content and pedagogical standards require substantial investigation and design on the part of teachers. Teachers need time to collaborate with grade-level colleagues and to interact across the K-12 continuum to ensure that the social studies skills are developed with an eye to the final assessments and adhere to the vertical articulation in the Framework. Teachers need to experiment with elements of the Toolkit and exchange thoughts on best practices for their unique schools and classrooms. Teachers also need to develop deeper understanding of content and pedagogical practice through professional development. Numerous opportunities exist and teachers should be both permitted and encouraged to take advantage of continuous learning.

D. Teachers wish for administrators to be familiar with both the changes in the Framework and the accompanying instructional shifts. The Inquiry Design Model, and more broadly the C3, create classrooms that do not fit the old traditional models. Teachers are confident that this is welcomed and even encouraged by administrators, but speaking a common vernacular and seeing other educational initiatives as compliment - and not competition - to the Framework itself is essential. As the assessments are also still in development, administrators and teachers need to work closely to address the changes and to understand together the new expectations so that matters of APPR and test-driven analysis of student performance do not overwhelm conversations about the shifts or overshadow other, less tangible benefits of the new approach. We need to be partners in the development, inclusion, improvement and maintenance of the Framework and Toolkit so that the enduring vision is honored in our classes and schools.

On behalf of the CNYCSS Board, we hope to assist you and your school's' implementation of the NYS Social Studies Framework and Toolkit. Please consider joining our group and furthering our commitment to make our region the best in the country for social studies. We are available to discuss these changes with you and your teachers directly, and we will continue to offer opportunities for you to join the conversations in our community. We thank you for the attentiveness and openness to a new era in social studies instruction and we hope you share in our aspiration for its well-deserved inclusion in the “core” of instruction.