

# 2018 Proposed Revisions to Massachusetts History and Social Studies Frameworks

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The January 2018 Public Comment Draft of the Massachusetts History and Social Science Curriculum Framework (2018 Revision) follows in the footsteps of other recent revisions of the Science, English Language Arts and mathematics standards. In each case, the revised version of the standards has declined in content and coherence. Sadly, the 2018 Revision of the History and Social Science Curriculum Framework eviscerates the 2003 Framework.

There are five ways in which the 2018 Revision is deficient:

- The 2003 Framework organized its curriculum around coherent sequences of American and European history; the 2018 Revision substitutes incoherent fragments that obstruct students from learning about historical progression.
- The 2003 Framework provided crisply written standards that were easy for teachers to understand and incorporate into their classrooms; the 2018 Revision lengthens the standards by 50% and conveys them in unreadable education-school jargon.
- The 2003 Framework gave students a history that provided a full account of our country's European past and its own exceptional history; the 2018 Revision replaces much of that narrative with the history of politically correct protest movements.
- The 2003 Framework gave students sufficient time to learn European and American history; the 2018 Revision abbreviates to deficiency the European and American history sequences.
- Perhaps most importantly, the 2003 Framework ensured that parents and the public could judge how well Massachusetts schools taught history by culminating in a statewide test, the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS). The 2018 Revision eliminates assessment, and substitutes meaningless "expectations" for each grade.

The 2018 Revision justifies its revisions as a way to enhance civic knowledge. This rationale is groundless, since the 2003 Framework integrated sustained instruction in America's governmental structure with its history curriculum, and culminated with an American Government



elective in the twelfth grade. The 2018 Revision actually serves the Massachusetts Department of Education’s “civic engagement” initiative, conducted since 2012, which is part of a national movement that replaces classroom knowledge of civics with skills training for progressive community activism. The 2018 Revision’s anodyne phrase that teachers should use the Framework “to inspire their students to become informed and engaged citizens” (p. 61) euphemizes the subordination of history instruction to preparation for progressive activism.

The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) should reject the 2018 Revision in its entirety, and immediately put into effect both the 2003 Framework and the accompanying MCAS. If the DESE is truly intent on strengthening civics instruction, it should go even further:

1. Turn the 2003 Framework’s American Government elective into a required course;
2. Add a Civics component to the MCAS; and
3. Endorse the Civics Education Initiative, already enacted in 15 states, which requires high-school students to pass the same test that immigrants applying for U.S. citizenship must pass.

The 2003 Framework is widely considered one of the strongest in the country. Given that strong foundation, one would think that future revisions to the 2003 Framework would preserve its focus on content knowledge, its crisp prose, its detailed and coherent chronological sequences for the history of Europe and America, its integration with MCAS, and its integration of civics instruction into the chronological sequences of European and American history.

Finally, were the DESE interested in improving upon the 2003 Framework, there are important content areas that should be incorporated. These include:

- The role of DNA analysis in expanding our knowledge of human prehistory;
- The historical development of Islamic belief before the emergence of the current version of the Koran *ca.* 800;
- The development of bourgeois virtues in Europe and America as the cultural underpinnings of the free-market economic revolution;
- The history of religious liberty in Europe and America;
- The modern development in Europe and America of the architecture of knowledge, from art history to zoology;
- America’s shared twentieth-century culture;
- The postwar rise of the American administrative state; and
- The rise of China as a peer competitor to the United States.