**CURRICULUM REVISION PROJECT**

One of the most successful experiences I had was the revision of the Social Studies Curriculum in the school where I served as Department Chair for six years. Certainly school change requires good navigational skills. I inherited a curriculum rife with gaps and redundancies—students seemed to cover the US Constitution every year and never learn what was happening in the rest of the world. Teachers were wedded to what they were teaching. The parent population needed to be educated and the School Committee, who made final decisions, was comprised entirely of non-educators who knew little of scope, sequence, or pedagogy. I was fortunate to have two new administrators who were eager to be seen as agents of change. Finally, not only was I new to the position, but the position itself was new and my taking the chair of the department coincided with its formation.

What follows are the key steps in this endeavor.

**CURRICULUM OVERVIEW: STEP ONE**

**Survey of Current Practice**

HISTORIC CONTENT

What topics do you currently teach?

What is the time frame covered?

LANGUAGE

Items to Consider:

* Discussion
* Questions, Listening and Contributing
* Oral Presentation
* Vocabulary Concept and Development
* Content Scope and Sequence

1. Do you do all of these skills? Please identify any ones you OMIT.
2. Please identify any additional language skills you cover with your class(es) over the course of the school year.
3. Please list specific assignments/projects related to Social Studies/History that you do with your students over the course of the school year.

**READING AND LITERACY**

1. Reading Skills-Please identify those skills that you teach.
2. Do you cover Understanding Text (facts and main idea) AND Making Connections (context)?
3. For each of the following, please list those works that your students read or have read to them:

Primary Sources

Secondary Sources

Visual Documents

4. Do you provide direct instruction?

5.Are there other texts that you expose the students to? Please list them

**WRITING AND COMPOSITION**

Writing (clear focus, coherent organization and sufficient detail)

Consideration of Audience and purpose

Revision

Standard English Conventions

Organize Ideas in Writing

Research

Evaluating Writing and Presentations

Please list all written assignments and projects that your students are assigned over the course of the year. What supports do you offer your students?

**CURRICULUM OVERVIEW: STEP TWO**

**Summary and Presentation of Findings**

I compiled the findings and shared with the following stakeholders:

Department Members

Key Administrators

Parents

School Committee

Colleagues in other departments, particularly the Learning Specialists and English teachers.

CURRICULUM OVERVIEW: STEP THREE

Involving the administration/Presenting the Plan.

I am including a series of letters and charts that outlined the plan I hoped to implement, including action plans presented to the various stakeholders, in particular members of the History Department, Key Administrators and the School Committee. I stayed in the position to ensure that the implementation would proceed as planned and my understanding is that it remains in effect over 10 years after it was first initiated.

**SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION**

Dear Dr. X and Mr. Y December 2002

I wanted to the take the opportunity to thank you for creating the position of Social Studies Department Chair. It has given those who teach Social Studies courses in grades 7-12 a sense of cohesion in our endeavors that had not previously existed. I have asked those who teach Jewish history to participate in department activities to learn about that portion of our curriculum as well as look for possible opportunities to parallel the two curricula. For this first year, I have made learning about the scope and sequence of our courses in terms of both content and skill development the primary goal of the department. To this end, I have been asking members of the department to forward me all materials they give their students, visiting classes, and meeting with my department colleagues on a regular basis.

It is wonderful to be a Social Studies teacher at Xxxxxxx. Teachers have a great deal of autonomy of the classroom, and given the vast amount of material they cover, exercise their own judgments and interests in selecting the topics they emphasize and the resources they use. This need to “pick and choose” also reflects the number of periods allotted for Social Studies courses. In Grade 9, for example, the course is scheduled for three periods a week and covers World History from the beginning of human development to 1789 and incorporates age appropriate skill development in writing, reading, and critical thinking. The class meets between 85 to 90 periods over the span of the school year, a situation that necessitates some judicious selection on the teacher’s part.

For new teachers in particular, the absence of a formal Social Studies curriculum beyond the general labels of American History or Civics gives them little guidance about what subjects are mandatory to cover. All members of our department acknowledge the reality that in the absence of a clearly delineated curriculum, there are no assurances about what one’s current students have been taught in the past, and therefore key topics, such as the US Constitution are repeated, while many others are omitted. The current sequence of course offerings (please see page 3 of this letter) also contributes to the repetition of some topics and the exclusion of others. Our students do not study modern European history (except as a Grade 12 AP elective), and so much of what they learn in American history lacks the necessary context of its European background. The first weeks of US history in Grade 10 (a one semester course) are spent providing the background of the world from which those who settled America came. This need to provide a European context continues throughout 11th grade when the students continue their study of American history. In Jewish history, students study Zionism in 10th grade before they begin their comprehensive study of Jewish history in Grade 11. They do not begin their study of 19th century Jewish history until the second semester of Grade 12.

Now with the more formal structure of a department, our hope is to coordinate the content and skill sequence in a way that benefits our students and allows the energy and talents of our teachers to be used to their fullest capacities. Of particular interest to members of the department are the following:

1. A course sequence that provides content foundation for subsequent courses
2. A more clearly delineated curriculum of skill development from Grades 7-12
3. The formal introduction of Jewish history earlier in our students education
4. Coordination of Jewish history with the general studies history curriculum
5. A developmentally appropriate Middle School Social Studies curriculum that also lays a foundation of skills for the study of history in the Upper School.
6. The opportunity for a variety of electives in Grade 12 on rotating basis
7. The time and opportunity to create Numbers 1 through 6.

We are eager to begin the process to implement these ideas but recognize that some decisions are beyond the scope of our department, particularly any that will affect staffing or scheduling. I welcome the opportunity to begin a dialogue with you as we continue our own efforts in this arena. Thank you for your consideration in these matters.

Sincerely yours,

Dr. Debra Block

Social Studies Department Chair

**History Department Scope and Sequence: Content (old curriculum)**

# Grade 7: Geography and World Cultures (3 pds/wk)

Mapping skills, atlas work

Appreciation of cultures: area studies may include a variety of contemporary Western and non-Western civilizations

# Grade 8: Civics (3 pds/wk)

Origins of American government

American government and legal system

Federal government: Executive, Judicial and Legislation

State and Local government

Political party system

Citizenship: rights and obligations

# Grade 9: World History (3 pds/wk)

Archaeology and pre-history

Ancient Cultures

Development of Europe: Feudalism, Renaissance, Age of Revolution

Non-Western World: China, Japan, Hinduism

**Grade 10: US History until 1800 (3 pds/wk)** (half-year course)

**Zionism, mid- 19th century –present** **(3 pds/wk)** (half-year course) Pass/Fail

# Grade 11: US History, 1800-Present (4 pds/wk)

**Sociology elective (3 pds/wk)**

**Jewish History, the beginning of the Common Era until the expulsion from Spain**

**(2 pds/wk)**

**Grade 12: Electives (3 pds/wk)**

**Political Science**

**Psychology**

# European History, 1500-Present

**Jewish History, 1492-Present (2 pds/wk)**

**DEPARTMENT MEMBERS**

We will be having a department meeting tomorrow, **Wednesday December 4,** 6th period in Room 1. I am attaching a draft of a letter to the School Committee, identifying the current state of social studies education in grades 7-12. After conferring with Mark and Ken, we agreed that this approach was the best first step. The intention of the letter is to identify the strengths and weaknesses of our curriculum, and then elicit the school committee’s input into the process of solving the problems.

For tomorrow’s meeting, please skim the letter and then we will look at it together. I want to emphasize that this is a **DRAFT**. I want to be sure that we are all comfortable with its content and message. It also is not in polished form. At this point, I just want to be sure that all the pertinent points are there. I have tried to balance how swell we are and how difficult the system is. I welcome your comments and criticism and look forward to collaborating on this very important process.

I am also happy to be getting the skill overviews from you. I am compiling a ‘master’ overview and when I have received all of the data, will share it with you. I hope to have this 7-12 skill overview completed to attach to the letter to the School Committee. I look forward to seeing you tomorrow. If you are unable to attend, please let me know.

Thank you,

To: The Xxxxxxx School Committee

From: Dr. Debra Block, High School Social Studies Department Chair

I wanted to the take the opportunity to thank you for creating the position of Social Studies department chair. It has given those who teach social studies courses in grades 7-12 a sense of cohesion in our endeavors that had not existed before. I have asked those who teach Jewish history to participate in department activities as well, to learn about that portion of our curriculum as well as look for possible opportunities to parallel the two curricula. I had anticipated that I would spend this year learning about the scope and sequence content. To this end, I have been asking members of the department to forward me all materials they give their students, visiting classes, and meeting with my department colleagues as well as Mr. Weinstein and Rabbi Gottlieb on a regular basis.

Much of what I have seen has been extraordinary. From the newest members of the department (and those brand new to teaching) to the seasoned veterans, the faculty displays creativity, energy, enthusiasm, and respect for the discipline. Teachers combine innovation and tradition as they get students to understand that history is more than dates and facts but the story of human beings. To this end, the complexity and paradoxical nature of individuals informs the instruction about the collective, and our students show genuine curiosity about the past as well as the relevance of the past for the present. Assignments such as writing the Teenage Declaration of Independence, simulations of the Constitutional Convention, and *havrutas* with seniors taking on the role of Locke and Hobbes are just a few of the extraordinarily creative ways history comes alive for our students.

Being students of history themselves, the members of the department also display an enormous respect for tradition in terms of the skills they teach. In the younger grades, courses cover noting taking, map reading, and paragraph development. Short essays and fact-based research are also part of the middle school Social Studies curriculum. Grades 9 and 10 introduce research methods, primary sources, and expository writing skills. All of these tasks are continued and refined in the upper grades and juniors and seniors gain familiarity with scholarly works and begin to gain an appreciation for what the study of history truly entails.

What is most extraordinary about all of these wonderful components of our students’ social studies education is that they are completely fortuitous. None of them is the result of an overarching plan or design, and despite all of the wonderful things that happen for our students, we are not serving them nearly as well as we might.

Again, just as the assets are not by design, neither are the problems but I feel compelled to share with you the weaknesses of social studies education in grades 7-12 and solicit your assistance in trying to improve these problems that I enumerate below. I have separated out the issues, but clearly the problems in one area influence those in other arenas. It is also clear from speaking to past administrators and long term faculty members that the origins of these shortcomings are not from a single source and assigning blame would be both difficult and unnecessary. The key is to describe the problems and begin a dialogue about how best to improve the situation:

1. **Content gaps**

I have attached the sequence of social studies education, grades 7-12, in Document #1. From what I can ascertain decisions were made ad hoc in terms of sequence of courses as well as the amount of periods assigned, without a comprehensive vision. This is true in Jewish history where our students are introduced to Zionism in 10th grade, and then learn the ancient and medieval periods in 11th grade and post-1492 period as seniors.

In general studies, our students rarely get to the modern period and despite the best efforts of the teachers, the curriculum outline is rarely fulfilled. This problem gets worse in the upper grades when seniors have a spotty attendance record, are not in the building on Fridays second semester, and end all formal classes by mid-April. As a result, our students graduate without learning about the holocaust or the founding of the state of Israel. While many other topics are also not covered, it would seem that the omission of these two are the most egregious. Our students never learn non-Western culture or modern European history (except as an AP elective for seniors, and even then it is quite a push to cover 500 years in a grand total of 60 periods over the course of the year). The ninth grade course attempts to cover from the beginning of civilization to the French Revolution, also somewhat difficult in 85-90 periods per year.

The problem stems from the few periods that social studies courses are allotted plus the vast amount of material that must be covered. In addition, we must teach skills in reading, writing, and critical thinking. The vastness of the material and paucity of time has created a situation where much of the curriculum must be omitted and in the absence of oversight, teachers are left with a fair amount of autonomy to pick and choose.

1. **Content sequence**

The sequence, also identified in Document #1, further compounds the problems identified above as well as introduces a few new concerns. Grade 7 covers Geography and perhaps could be an opportunity for study of non-Western cultures, but many of the topics in this discipline need more sophisticated understanding than is possible for most seventh graders. Grade 8 covers Civics and provides a good foundation of knowledge about government. Many of its topics are repeated in Grades 10 and 11 in US history. Grade 9, as mentioned above, is the most ambitious course of study and the breadth of the course is simply too much for one year. In recent years the teacher has also been trying to incorporate non-western culture as well as research and writing skills. Our students are not required to study modern European history, and so much of what they learn in American history lacks the necessary context of its European background. The first weeks of US history in Grade 10 (a one semester course), are spent providing the background of the world from which those who settled America came. This need to provide a European context continues into 11th grade. The senior electives have varied over the years, although Political Science and AP European history have been consistently offered in recent years.

1. **Periods allotted for social studies instruction**

Again referring to document #1, students only have 3 total periods for history in grades 7 through 10. No Jewish history is scheduled at all in grades 7-9 and then a half year of Zionism in grade 10. A huge leap forward is made in grade 11 where students have US history for 4 periods and Jewish History for 2. Senior year has 3 periods for a history elective and 2 periods for Jewish History. While students are more sophisticated in their thought in these upper grades, they are also much more distracted. To have major curriculum items slated for second semester senior year is not a successful endeavor.

1. **All courses are personality driven**

While I certainly support the notion of autonomy of the classroom, because there has been so little oversight, teachers have had complete freedom to develop their courses as they like. Also, because so much content must be covered, by necessity teachers must pick and choose. Given the talent of many of the teachers, this problem would not seem to be worth mentioning but it truly interferes with our students learning. Because there are no assurances what one’s students have been taught, a lot of repetition occurs on key topics, e.g. the US Constitution is covered in grade 8, 10, and 11 and many other topics get short-shrifted. This problem has been exacerbated because of the paucity of periods. If a senior AP class meets 60 times in the space of a year, clearly the instructor needs to make some choices. And most people are dynamic and dedicated but this is a systemic problem. Individual teachers have had random, isolated conversations over the years, but any coordination as been haphazard rather than intentional. This is true throughout the department as well as in those years when the history and English curricula are supposed to be coordinated (Grades 9 and 11).

I would welcome the opportunity to attend one of your meetings to discuss these problems and begin to work on possible solutions to them. Thank you for taking the time to read this document and your consideration in these matters.

**SCHOOL COMMITTEE DECEMBER 15, 2002**

The Xxxxxxx School Committee

34 Xxxxxx Road

Xxxxxxx, MA

Mrs. T, Mrs. K, Dr. L, Mrs. M, Mr. S, and Dr. S:

I wanted to the take the opportunity to thank you for creating the position of Social Studies Department Chair. It has given those who teach Social Studies courses in grades 7-12 a sense of cohesion in our endeavors that had not previously existed. I have asked those who teach Jewish history to participate in department activities to learn about that portion of our curriculum as well as look for possible opportunities to parallel the two curricula. For this first year, I have made learning about the scope and sequence of our courses in terms of both content and skill development the primary goal of the department. To this end, I have been asking members of the department to forward me all materials they give their students, visiting classes, and meeting with my department colleagues as well as Mr. Weinstein and Rabbi Gottlieb on a regular basis.

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Being students of history themselves, the members of the department also display an enormous respect for tradition in terms of the skills they teach. In Grades 7 and 8, students learn how to take notes, read and create maps, and gather facts. Teachers use age-appropriate primary sources, textbooks and contemporary media. Students write short essays and present material in a variety of creative projects. In Grades 9 and 10, teachers introduce more sophisticated research methods, primary sources, and expository writing skills. All of these tasks are continued and refined in the upper grades. Juniors and seniors also gain familiarity with scholarly works, and begin to appreciate what the study of history truly entails.

It is wonderful to be a Social Studies teacher at Maimonides. Teachers have a great deal of autonomy of the classroom, and given the vast amount of material they cover, exercise their own judgments and interests in selecting the topics they emphasize and the resources they use. This need to “pick and choose” also reflects the number of periods allotted for Social Studies courses. In Grade 9, for example, the course is scheduled for three periods a week and covers World History from the beginning of human development to 1789 and incorporates age appropriate skill development in writing, reading, and critical thinking. The class meets between 85 to 90 periods over the span of the school year, a situation that necessitates some judicious selection on the teacher’s part.

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Now with the more formal structure of a department, our hope is to coordinate the content and skill sequence in a way that benefits our students and allows the energy and talents of our teachers to be used to their fullest capacities. Of particular interest to members of the department are the following:

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6. The opportunity for a variety of electives in Grade 12 on rotating basis
7. The time and opportunity to create Numbers 1 through 6.

We are eager to begin the process to implement these ideas but recognize that some decisions are beyond the scope of our department, particularly any that will affect staffing or scheduling. We would welcome the opportunity to begin a dialogue with the School Committee as we continue our own efforts in this arena. I am available to discuss this matter in more depth at the School Committee’s earliest convenience. Thank you for your consideration in these matters.

Sincerely yours,

Dr. Debra Block

Social Studies Department Chair

**SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION February 2003**

Dear Dr. X and Mr. Y:

I have been working with the department to revise the current Social Studies curriculum. Our general plan includes:

1. Expanding Civics to a full middle school American history class
2. Expanding Geography into a full middle school World Cultures (non-Western civilization) class

[note: for both 1. and 2., we are mindful of middle school needs and the role of Grade 7 as a transition year from elementary to middle school]

1. A two year Western Civilization class in grades 9 and 10, stopping at approximately 1500 at the end of 9th grade.

4. A parallel two year Jewish history course in grades 9 and 10.

1. There will no longer be a Zionism course –the basic material can be covered in the 10th Grade JH II class in its proper sequence and then a more in-depth course could be offered as a Senior elective.
2. An expanded 11th grade American history course (from 4 to 5 periods) to now absorb the material from the 10th grade half year course.
3. The really exciting part –the possibility of 6 half year electives for seniors which will enable the school to invite in visiting scholars, offer all sorts of Jewish and other history options. The first few years we will still need to offer AP European history as a full year option, but from the first year, we will have at least four possible elective slots.

The new course sequence will be (with number of periods in parentheses)

Grade 7: a Middle School American History class (3)

Grade 8: World Cultures (3)

Grades 9 Western Civilization I (3) and Jewish History I (2)

Grades 10: Western Civilization II (3) and Jewish History II(2)

Grade 11: American History (5)

Grade 12: Semester electives (3)

A more comprehensive plan is delineated on Chart 1.

Please bear the following in mind as you consider this proposal:

1. It will take four years to phase in these changes and the there will be duplication (or creative modification) of some courses in some years, absence of others in some years, but the long range plan is the objective. We are fortunate to have such a depth of resources to help out during these transitional years. Rabbi Shapiro would be happy to teach Jewish history.

A more detailed account of the four year phase-in procedure is presented in Chart 2.

1. We are mindful of everyone’s desire to keep the number of total periods of instruction at the present level. Although there will be some shifting during the phase-in period, there will be no increase once the curriculum is fully in place.

At present, in grades 7-12, students have 17 ½ periods of General history and 5 ½ periods of Jewish history (counting half years for Zionism and US history in Grade 10). Under the new plan, there will be 17 periods of General history in Grades 7-11, four periods of Jewish history in Grades 9-10, and then 3 periods for semester long electives in Grade 12, half of which will be in Jewish history. So there are 23 total history periods now, and 24 in the new plan but Mr. Weinstein explained that the one period for the current 9th grade art/computer science elective will be allotted to the social studies curriculum.

1. The department has discussed the general framework, but still needs time to truly create the curriculum.

Again, thank you for your consideration and support on this exciting initiative that will truly enhance our students’ education.

Sincerely,

Dr. Debra Block

Social Studies Department Chair

**CHART 1: PROPOSED SOCIAL STUDIES CURRICULUM**

**YEAR BY YEAR**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | YEAR 1 | YEAR 2 | YEAR 3 | YEAR 4 | YEAR 5 | YEAR 6 |
| **Grade 7** | American History (3) | World Cultures (3) | Western Civilization I (3)  Jewish History I (2) | Western Civilization II (3)  Jewish History II (2) | American History (5) | Semester Electives (3) | |
| **Grade 8**  (Had Geography in Grade 7) | American History (3) | Western Civilization I (3)  Jewish History I (2) | Western Civilization II (3)  Jewish History II (2) | American History (5) | Semester Electives (3) |  | |
| **Grade 9**  (Had Civics in Grade 8, Geography in Grade 7) | Western Civilization I (3)  Jewish History I (2) | Western Civilization II (3)  Jewish History II (2) | American History (5) | Semester Electives (3) |  |  | |
| **Grade 10**  (Had World History to 1789 in Grade 9, Civics in Grade 8, Geography in Grade 7) | Western Civ, 1789-Present (3) for a half-year; Jewish History I (2) for a half year | American History (5) | AP European History (3) for a full year  Semester Electives (3) Jewish History II (2) |  |  |  | |
| **Grade 11**  (same as Grade 10 above plus ½ year Zionism and ½ year American History to 1800) | American History, 1800-Present (4)  Jewish History I (2) | AP European History (3) for a full year  Semester Electives (3)  Jewish History II (2) |  |  |  |  | |
| **Grade 12**  (same as Grade 11 above plus American History from 1800 and Jewish History I) | European History (3) for a full year  Semester Electives (3)  Jewish History II (2) |  |  |  |  |  | |

**CHART II: FOUR YEAR PHASE IN PLAN FOR NEW**

## SOCIAL STUDIES CURRICULUM

CURRENT YEAR 1 YEAR 2 YEAR 3 YEAR 4

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Grade 7:  Geography (3) | American History (3) | American History (3) | American History (3) | American History (3) |
| Grade 8:  Civics (3) | American History (3) | World Cultures (3) | World Cultures (3) | World Cultures (3) |
| Grade 9:  World History to 1789 (3) | Western Civilization I (3)  Jewish History I (2) | Western Civilization I (3)  Jewish History I (2) | Western Civilization I (3)  Jewish History I (2) | Western Civilization I (3)  Jewish History I (2) |
| Grade 10:  ½ year Zionism  ½ year US to 1800 (3) | Western Civilization 1789-Present for ½ year and Jewish History I for ½ year (3) | Western Civilization II (3)  Jewish History II (2) | Western Civilization II (3)  Jewish History II (2) | Western Civilization II (3)  Jewish History II (2) |
| Grade 11  US History, 1800-Present (4)  Jewish History I (2) | US History, 1800-Present (4)  Jewish History I (2) | US History, 1607-Present (5) | US History, 1607-Present (5) | US History, 1607-Present (5) |
| Grade 12  Electives (3)  Jewish History II (2) | European History (3); Semester electives(3)  Jewish History II (2) | European History (3); Semester electives(3)  Jewish History II (2) | European History (3); Semester electives(3) Jewish History II (2) | Semester electives (3) |

(Number of periods that the course will meet is noted in parentheses)