

# **ISNA 2007 Educational Forum**

## **‘Role of Standards in Our Spiritual Journey’**

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### **Standards in the History Classroom: A Framework for Teaching, Learning and Instruction**

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#### Introduction

The spiritual journey of Islamic Schools, Muslim educators and teachers as well as Muslim students, parents and families is a continuous process of change, evolution and adaptation. The current ‘standards movement’ in the field of education and across the curriculum is an excellent opportunity to enhance the framework for teaching, learning and instruction. While there is on-going debate as to the merits of the standards movement, at the very least they provide benchmarks for what teachers should be presenting in their classrooms and what students should be learning.

In history, there are several academic content standards that one can utilize in creating both one’s teaching philosophy and instructional models. The history-social studies instructor that is keen in preparing their students for the next level – middle school, high school or college – will incorporate more than just one of the following history standards in their curriculum and instruction.

- History Academic Content Standards (State-Mandated)
- National Council for the Social Studies Standards
- National Geography Standards
- National Government & Civic Standards
- National History Standards (National Center for History)
- World History Standards (National Center for History)

Despite the fact that the ‘standards movement’ in this country is sometimes considered controversial and has its proponents and detractors, it is critical for Islamic Schools to adopt proactive policies regarding them. It is imperative that American-Muslim students compete with their colleagues and classmates on a level that is academically and intellectually parallel with other school curriculums across the spectrum of our country.

#### Outline

In this paper, I will examine the major academic standards in history and how classroom teachers and educators can best utilize them in their curriculums. This paper will explore how classroom teachers can effectively use these standards in building the structure for students to learn about specific academic contents throughout history. Moreover, this process will enable teachers to

introduce concepts like historical reflection, independent decision-making and contemporary analysis for their students.

A step-by-step process will be outlined for teachers, educators and schools to follow in incorporating the standards into their curriculums and making them user-friendly for their staff, students and parents.

The outline of the paper is listed below:

- ❑ **Introduction**
- ❑ **Outline**
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  - History Academic Content Standards (State-Mandated)
  - National Council for the Social Studies Standards
  - National Geography Standards
  - National Government & Civic Standards
  - National History Standards (National Center for History)
  - World History Standards (National Center for History)
- ❑ **Section II - How to Effectively Utilize the Standards**
- ❑ **Section III - Building the HSS Classroom through the Standards**
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## SECTION I - Description of the Content Standards

### State-Mandated Framework & Standards

In all states across the United States, the department of education in each state will produce the mandated framework and standards for all the different academic disciplines. For the purposes of this paper and presentation, I will reference the California Department of Education document for history-social studies. The *History-Social Science Framework for California Public Schools* is the master guide for teaching history-social studies in the state. Comparable documents will be found in every state for history-social studies.

The document is divided into two major parts: (1) Goals and Curriculum Strands and (2) Course Descriptions. The section on goals and curriculum strands are further sub-divided into three segments. These segments and their associated strands are listed below:

- Goal of Knowledge & Cultural Understanding
  - Historical Literacy
  - Ethical Literacy
  - Cultural Literacy
  - Geographic Literacy
  - Economic Literacy
  - Sociopolitical Literacy
- Goal of Democratic Understanding and Civic Values
  - National Identity
  - Constitutional Heritage
  - Civic Values, Rights and Responsibilities
- Goals of Skills, Attainment and Social Participation
  - Participation Skills
  - Critical Thinking Skills
  - Basic Study Skills

The section on course descriptions includes brief descriptions and standards for the different grade levels ranging from kindergarten through twelfth grade. Themes are provided for each grade related to the course of study for that year. For example, in the eighth grade, students study about the United States. The theme of the year is, United States History and Geography: Growth and Conflict and eight pages are dedicated for describing what students will be learning. Next, the content standards for the major periods of history are delineated. Seventy-nine sub-standards are categorized under twelve broad standards. For example, the table below lists the broad major academic content standards for the eighth grade.

8<sup>th</sup> Grade History-Social Science Academic Content Standards  
United States History & Geography: Growth and Conflict

**8.1** – Students understand the major events preceding the founding of the nation and relate their significance to the development of American constitutional democracy.

**8.2** – Students analyze the political principles underlying the U.S. Constitution and compare the enumerated and implied powers of the federal government.

**8.3** – Students understand the foundation of the American political system and the ways in which citizens participate in it.

**8.4** – Students analyze the aspirations and ideals of the people of the new nation.

**8.5** – Students analyze U.S. foreign policy in the early Republic.

**8.6** – Students analyze the divergent paths of the American people from 1800 to the mid-1800s and the challenges they faced with emphasis on the Northeast.

**8.7** – Students analyze the divergent paths of the American people in the South from 1800 to the mid-1800s and the challenges they faced.

**8.8** – Students analyze the divergent paths of the American people in the West from 1800 to the mid-1800s and the challenges they faced.

**8.9** – Students analyze the early and steady attempts to abolish slavery and to realize the ideals of the Declaration of Independence.

**8.10** – Students analyze the multiple causes, key events and complex consequences of the Civil War.

**8.11** – Students analyze the character and lasting consequence of Reconstruction.

**8.12** – Students analyze the transformation of the American economy and the changing social and political conditions in the United States in response to the Industrial Revolution.

## National Council for the Social Studies Standards

The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) is one of the largest social studies organizations in the country. It is the umbrella organization for all state social studies organizations and addresses the needs of teachers of pre-K to high school. As one of the leading social studies organizations in the country, it undertook the task of creating standards for its discipline.

In 1994 the NCSS produced and published the document, *Curriculum Standards for Social Studies: Expectations of Excellence*. In this comprehensive and detailed document, ten major thematic strands that all social studies teachers, educators and programs should address in their curriculums is outlined. In one section of the document, these ten strands are defined and explained. In another section the performance expectations for the early grades, middle grades and high school are provided. In the last part of the document, specific examples of the performance expectations are given for each grade.

The ten thematic strands and their focus are given below:

- Culture – culture helps us to understand ourselves as both individuals and members of various groups.
- Time, Continuity and Change – human beings seek to understand their historical roots and to locate themselves in time.
- People, Places and Environments – technological advances connect students at all levels to the world beyond their personal locations.
- Individual Development and Identity – personal identity is shaped by one’s culture, by groups and by institutional influences.
- Individuals, Groups and Institutions – institutions such as churches, families, government agencies and the courts all play an integral role in our lives.
- Power, Authority and Governance – understanding the historical development of structures of power, authority and governance and their evolving functions in contemporary U.S. society, as well as in other parts of the world, is essential for developing civic competence.
- Production, Distribution and Consumption - social studies program should include experiences that provide for the study of how people organize for the production, distribution and consumption of goods and services.
- Science, Technology and Society – technology is as old as the first crude tool invented by prehistoric humans, but today’s technology forms the basis for some of our most difficult social choices.
- Global Connections – the realities of global interdependencies require understanding the increasingly important and diverse global connections among world societies.
- Civic Ideals and Practices – an understanding of civic ideals and practices of citizenship is critical to full participation in society and is a central purpose of the social studies.

## National Geography Standards

In 1994 the document, *Geography for Life: What Every Young American Should Know and be Able To Do in Geography*, was published and set forth as the national standards for the field of geography. The document was produced by the Geography Education Standards Project which included the following organizations: (1) American Geographical Society; Association of American Geographers; (3) National Council for Geographic Education and the (4) National Geographic Society.

The standards for geography are divided into six broad categories and they are listed below:

- The World in Spatial Terms
- Places and Regions
- Physical Systems
- Human Systems
- Environment and Society
- The Uses of Geography

## National Standards for Civics & Government

The Center for Civic Education is a nonprofit, nonpartisan educational corporation dedicated to promoting an enlightened and responsible citizenry committed to democratic principles and actively engaged in the practice of democracy in the United States and other countries (Center Website).

In 1994 the Center published the document, *National Standards for Civics and Government*, as an attempt to improve student achievement and teacher practices. The document divides the standards into the three major grades levels; (1) kindergarten through fourth grades; (2) fifth through eighth grades and (3) ninth through twelfth grades. In each grade level several broad questions form the basis of all the standards for that particular grade levels. Within each particular standard the following components are present: (1) Content summary and rationale and (2) Content Standards.

The broad academic content standards for the fifth through eighth grades are listed below:

- Part I – What are civic life, politics and government?
- Part II – What are the foundations of the American political system?
- Part III – How does the government established by the Constitution embody the purposes, values and principles of American democracy?
- Part IV – What is the relationship of the United States to other nations and to world affairs?
- Part V – What are the roles of the citizen in American democracy?

Similar parts are present for the primary grades and the secondary grades.

## National Center for History in Schools

The National Center for History in the Schools (NCHS), founded in 1988 with a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, is a nationally known organization that has engaged the talents of scores of classroom teachers and provided history educators across the nation with new historical resources and teaching strategies. NCHS's double mission is (a) to aid the professional development of K-12 history teachers; and (b) to work with teachers to develop curricular materials that will engage students in exciting explorations of United States and World history (NCHS Website).

The *National History Standards* and *World History Standards* provide a framework for teachers and educators to present history to their students. Both standards offer teachers a new paradigm in thinking and teaching by presenting history in terms of eras. In this fashion, students learn about diverse happenings around the world at the same time, rather than separately engaging students in the study of specific civilizations or regions.

### SECTION II - How to Effectively Utilize the Standards

One of the most important factors in effectively using the academic standards in your classroom is to see how they correlate to the academic framework in your classroom. The state-mandated standards will naturally be designed with the state-mandated framework. The other content standards were created and designed with the larger framework in mind, however, the individual teacher must still incorporate them into their curriculums.

### Guiding Principles

- Study the state-mandated framework and standards.
  - Teachers should master the state-mandated framework and standards.
  - It is imperative that teachers are aware of what content is expected to be taught in their classrooms for specific grade levels.
  - Knowledge of these standards will allow teachers to tap into other academic standards for ideas, teaching strategies, and instructional methodologies
  - Teachers can gauge the level of mastery of previous standards by assessing their students at the beginning of the academic school year.
- Schools should adopt textbooks and other instructional materials that best address the state-mandated framework and standards.
  - Students learn from diverse methods including lecture, teacher presentation, textbook readings, projects (individual and group) and their primary instructional materials should best reflect the ideals of the standards.
  - Teachers should use a diverse range of teaching materials in the classroom to support the standards and content.
  - Teachers should not feel shy to teach 'out-of-the-box' in creating a learning environment that extends beyond the four walls of their classroom.

- Teachers and instructors should reflect on what type of assignments, projects and assessments would most effectively enhance the learning environment of the content (standards) for their students.
  - Teachers should building on the multiple intelligences and diversity of talents in one’s classroom, a variety of work is one of the best models to implement.
  - Teachers can tap into five major levels of work: (1) In-Class Assignments; (2) Homework; (3) Exams, Tests and Quizzes; (4) Projects (group & independent) and (5) Participation.
  - Assignments that connect to previous learnings and/or contemporary events are most useful and relevant
  
- Students should be given a copy of the standards at the beginning of the academic school year or at the very least prior to the beginning of every unit.
  - Students will learn more when they know exactly what is expected of them for any particular unit of instruction.
  - Students will be able to go beyond the basics, especially the high-achievers, and gain in-depth knowledge about the subject
  
- Colleagues and co-teachers should share standards with each other.

### SECTION III - Building the HSS Classroom through the Standards

Once students and teachers are using the standards on a regular and continuous basis, creativity and imagination can reign supreme in the history classroom. The history classroom should not be any ordinary classroom where teachers present ideas, students take notes and regular assessments are given. As Islamic Schools evolve, mature and grow within the context of a post-911 world, teaching and learning should reflect that reality. Hence, one of the priorities for the American-Muslim educational community should be to build young leaders focused on community outreach and social activism. What better place to accomplish this task and have such an encounter take place than the history classroom?

It is these twin pillars of ‘community outreach’ and ‘social activism’ that should be source of identity development for our schools. The standards provide that pivot for such extension of the content to take place. In an era where American-Muslim organizations and leaders are calling for their own self-analysis, self-critique and self-reform, Islamic Schools must play their role. American-Muslim teachers, educators and administrators must rise up and shoulder the responsibility of inculcating the democratic values of justice and peace within the context of our community in the United States.

Jean Ann Hunt, editor of *Democracy and Education*, states: “Teaching for social justice is at the core of democratic education. It serves as a reminder not only of the inequities and biases that



*continue to wear away at the foundation of democratic values, but of the powerful stories which inspire us to work toward change, to make the world a better place”*. Islamic Schools must not become isolated places of teaching, learning, and praying; rather they must serve as a model for the community where sharing and exchanging of diverse ideas takes place.

Listed below are some helpful hints on how the content standards can become building blocks in creating the history classroom described above.

### Building Blocks of Standards

- ❑ Content Standards should be the foundation to guide your teaching.
- ❑ Teachers and instructors should use the content standards as the ‘Big Ideas’ that all students are learning throughout the unit.
- ❑ Student assignments should reflect the content standards, especially in independent and group projects.
- ❑ Content Standards should be visible throughout the classroom, where students can point to it and discuss with their classmates.
- ❑ Link the content standards to the school’s ‘Expected School-wide Learning Results (ESLRS).

### SECTION IV - Cross-Curriculum Projects and Active Learning

Once educators, teachers and administrators use the academic content standards as building blocks in teaching, then a whole host of programming is available.

Here are some suggestions that Islamic Schools and Muslim educators can use to foster the climate of community outreach and social activism in their environment. Here are some factors that may contribute to the success of the programs described below: (1) geographic location of the school; (2) availability of funds; (3) commitment or lack of for the host community; (4) enthusiasm from teachers, administrators and parents; and (5) willingness of students to participate.

### Active Learning

- Annual Humanitarian Day
  - Feed the homeless program sponsored by Islamic Relief
  - Takes place on Sunday morning during the month of Ramadan
  - Community members serve the poor and homeless in a variety of ways
  - Practical example of Sura al-Maun in action
  - Prophetic tradition to serve humanity is best exemplified
  - Incredible field trip and experience for all involved (parents, students and kids)

- Mayor's Prayer Breakfast
  - Participate in annual event meant to create bonds within the community
  - Schools can take members of the student council or other student leaders
  - School administration, teachers and parents can also attend to show support for the city
  - Invite students to take the lead in participating in the event
  - Direct hands-on-activity in leadership training
  
- Interfaith Thanksgiving Celebration
  - Students participate in event by sharing reflections or readings from the Qur'an/Sunnah
  - Application of the message of Islam to share with others and be role models
  - Shows visibility of the American-Muslim community
  - Stress on leadership development and grooming of its next generation
  
- Hosting Public/Private School Classes
  - Invite one or more classes studying about Islam to visit your school/Masjid
  - Student leaders make presentations about being Muslim and living in the United States
  - Visitors observe the mid-day prayer and Q & A session with kids
  - Lunch is provided for the students to socialize and mingle
  - Tour of the school & Masjid grounds is given
  
- Religious Diversity Faire

### Cross Curriculum Projects

- World Geography Awareness Unit
  - Introduce basic geography concepts
  - Learn about the continents and countries of the world
  - Learn about the capitols and major cities around the globe
  - Learn about the major oceans, seas and river around the world
  - Learn about major land features across the continents
  
- World Religions Unit
  - Review or extend teaching about Islam as the following
    - Major world religion
    - Faith of over 20% of the worlds' population
    - Instrumental historical and political force
    - Major contributor to world civilization
  - Learn about the Abrahamic-Monotheistic traditions of Judaism and Christianity
  - Learn about the 2 world religions centered in Asia - Buddhism and Hinduism
  - Gain insight into the central role religion and faith have played historically and in contemporary times
  - Compare and contrast the pre-Islamic Arabia (Jahiliyyah) to modern 21<sup>st</sup> century

- Black History Month
  - ❑ Connect ‘Black History Month’ to the journey of Islam from Africa to this country
  - ❑ Trace the roots of African-Americans back to Africa
  - ❑ Examine the struggles of African-Americans through slavery, Reconstruction and the Civil Rights era
  - ❑ Analyze the contributions of African-Americans to the growth and development of the United States
  - ❑ Assess the impact of positive African-Americans role models, especially ones that are Muslim on young children today

## SECTION V - Conclusion

This paper provides a snapshot into how the academic content standards in the field of history-social studies classroom can pave the way to create a unique, reflective and action-oriented classroom.

A PowerPoint presentation will accompany this paper and provide additional hands-on approaches to creating the history classroom based on the standards focusing on academic knowledge, community outreach and social activism.

In closing I am reminded of the words of the archaeologist Margaret Mead who stated, “never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has”.

## SECTION VI - References

### ▪ Bibliography

These articles, books or documents were cited and used in this paper.

*Expectations of Excellence: Curriculum Standards for Social Studies*. Washington DC: Developed by the National Council for the Social Studies, 1994.

*Geography for Life: What Every Young American Should Know and Be Able to Do in Geography*. Washington D.C.: Developed by the Geography Education Standards Project, 1994.

*History-Social Science Framework for California Public Schools*. Sacramento, California: California Department of Education, 2000.

*National Standards for Civics and Government*. Calabasas, California: Center for Civic Education, 1994

*National Standards for United States History: Exploring the American Experience*. Los Angeles, California: National Center for History in the Schools, 1994.

*National Standards for World History: Exploring Paths to the Present*. Los Angeles, California: National Center for History in the Schools, 1994.

### ▪ Resources

These books are recommended for the teacher's professional library. They are quite helpful as reference and resource information.

Abiva, Huseyin and Noura Durkee. *A history of Muslim Civilization: Volume 1*. Skokie, Illinois: IQRA International Educational Foundation, 2003.

Ahsan, Muhammad. *Muslim Heritage and the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. London, United Kingdom: TaHa Publishers Ltd. 2002.

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Barboza, Steven. *American Jihad: Islam After Malcolm X*. New York: Doubleday, 1993.

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Khan, M.A. Muqtedar. *American Muslims: Bridging Faith and Freedom*. Beltsville, Maryland. Amana Publications, 2002.

Nasr, Seyyed Hossein. *A Young Muslim's Guide to the Modern World*. Chicago: KAZI Publications, 1994

Nyang, Sulayman. *Islam in the United States of America*. Chicago, Illinois: ABC International Group, Inc.: 1999.

- Educational Resources

American Historical Association (AHA) – [www.historians.org](http://www.historians.org)

Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) – [www.ascd.org](http://www.ascd.org)

Center for Civic Education (CCE) – [www.civiced.org](http://www.civiced.org)

Council on Islamic Education (CIE) – [www.cie.org](http://www.cie.org)

Middle East Studies Association (MESA) -

National Center for History in the Schools – [www.nchs.ucla.edu](http://www.nchs.ucla.edu)

National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) – [www.socialstudies.org](http://www.socialstudies.org)

National Middle School Association (NMSA) – [www.nmsa.org](http://www.nmsa.org)

