

Woke revolution looms for Minnesota schools

New education standards in Minnesota were drafted by demographic special interest groups and organizations with an aggressive political agenda.

By Katherine Kersten

FEBRUARY 6, 2021 — 6:00PM



ISTOCK

New education standards have been proposed, and it'll incite a woke revolution, Katherine Kersten says.

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Minnesota parents, are you ready for the coming "woke" invasion of your child's public school?

By 2022, as your first-grader is learning that two plus two is four, the Minnesota Department of Education intends to mandate that she also learn to recognize "stereotypes," "biased speech," and "injustice at the institutional or systemic level."

Your middle schooler will be drilled in how his identity is a function of his skin color.

Your high schooler will be required to explain how Europeans invented "whiteness" and that America's 19th-century westward expansion was the shameful product of "whiteness, Christianity and capitalism."

Not what you signed up for? Take a look at the new [K-12 social studies standards](#) that the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) is proposing to replace the [current standards](#), which lay out what students must "satisfactorily complete" to graduate from high school.

If the new standards are adopted, the next generation of Minnesota citizens will be not only uninformed — but scandalously misinformed — about our nation's history and democratic institutions. They will, however, be programmed to become the next generation of "woke" social activists, having spent their public-school years immersed in the lingo and thought world of the progressive left.

The new standards focus primarily on cultivating politically correct attitudes and commitments, rather than preparing students to take on the duties of citizenship by ensuring they understand the chronological story of the key events, actors and ideas that shaped American democracy and the larger world.

George Washington and D-Day rate no mention, though they were highlighted in earlier versions of the standards. Abraham Lincoln and the Battle of Gettysburg are omitted, but students study *partus sequitur ventrem* — the legal principle adopted in Virginia in 1662 that a child followed the slave or free status of its mother.

World history from classical Greece and Rome to World Wars I and II — a major focus of the current and original 2004 standards — has been virtually eliminated. In its place, for example, as young people study "where buildings can and cannot be built" in the U.S., they will learn about "feng shui" — a pseudoscientific Chinese practice that Merriam-Webster defines as configuring a site or structure to "harmonize with the spiritual forces that inhabit it."

MDE educrats acknowledge the proposed standards mark a "shift in approach to standards and social studies learning." That "shift" is in fact a revolution, as a comparison of Minnesota's [first statewide social studies standards](#), approved by the Legislature in 2004, with MDE's current draft reveals.

The 2004 standards took a "warts-and-all approach" to American history. But their primary purpose was to ensure that students "gain the knowledge and skills" necessary to "protect and maintain freedom," in a nation built by "individuals united in an ongoing quest for liberty, freedom, justice and opportunity."

MDE's proposed standards, by contrast, state that the purpose of social studies is to prepare students to address "powerful social, cultural and political inequities," by "examining their identities," becoming "conscious and critical of their own biases and those of the larger society," and examining various inequities' "connections to other axes of stratification, including gender, race, class, sexuality and legal status."

The ideology that powers the draft standards is "racial identity politics," a core tenet of today's fashionable "woke" agenda. The standards drill relentlessly into students' heads that their skin color defines who they are and how they see the world — directly contradicting the Rev. Martin

Luther King Jr.'s colorblind ideal. The new approach presents history as a one-dimensional power struggle between oppressive whites and victimized nonwhites.

Indoctrination in identity politics under these standards would start in kindergarten, where 5-year-olds will "identify surface and deep characteristics of different ways of being (identity)." Fourth-graders are coached on how one's "identity" and "biases influence decisions about how to use a space." Seventh-graders are exhorted to "define race and ethnicity from different perspectives and make connections to one's own ways of being (identities)."

By high school, students must "explain" — parrot back is more like it — "the social construction of race" and "assess how social policies and economic forces offer privilege or systematic oppressions for racial/ethnic groups."

The standards portray America as a very bad place indeed. From elementary school on, students will be propagandized that we live in a greedy, "imperialist" nation, permeated by "powerful social, cultural and political inequities" which young people must "take action" to "address." Yet they will lack the knowledge to put America's alleged shortcomings in context, in part because the standards are silent on 20th-century totalitarian movements and atrocities like Soviet gulags, the Nazi Holocaust, the Chinese Cultural Revolution and the 9/11 terror attacks.

The standards were drafted by a hand-picked committee of 44 people, many of whom represent demographic special interest groups or "equity" organizations with an aggressive political agenda.

For example, Native Americans make up about 1% of Minnesota's population, but nearly 20% of the committee. The new standards include a strikingly disproportionate emphasis on Indigenous people, and many benchmarks forthrightly promote activist Native American political priorities. It appears that a significant proportion of the class time previously devoted to U.S. and World history will now be focused on Native Americans.

MDE will adopt the standards in final form later this year, and a second draft that adds details and optional examples will appear before that. The standards will become law through administrative rule-making, without legislative involvement.

A stacked committee, unaccountable to the public, is rewriting history in a way that will profoundly affect our state's future. One man is ultimately responsible for this runaway ideological freight train — Gov. Tim Walz — and only he can stop it.

Katherine Kersten (kerstenkatherine@gmail.com.) is a senior policy fellow at the Center of the American Experiment, whose magazine Thinking Minnesota includes a longer treatment of these topics in its current issue.

Counterpoint: Why the shift in social studies standards is needed

The current Euro-American narrative taught in schools sanitizes colonialism and the historical racist roots of our country.

By Aaliyah Hodge

FEBRUARY 10, 2021 — 5:48PM



ISTOCK

New social studies standards are necessary for Minnesota's students, the writer argues.

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James Baldwin once asked, "It's taken my father's time, my mother's time ... my niece's and my nephew's time. How much time do you want for your progress?"

Katherine Kersten now insists we take our children's time as well ("Woke revolution looms for schools," [Opinion Exchange, Feb. 7](#)).

Blatant fearmongering veiled as patriotism and concern for students cannot stand. As a member of the Social Studies Standards Committee — and as a member of a "demographic special interest group," to quote Kersten — I feel compelled to respond.

Across this country, those in the global majority routinely have been cast as tertiary characters in the predominantly Euro-American narrative of history textbooks. This is also mirrored in our current state standards, through clear sanitizations of colonialism and the historical racist roots of our country, as evidenced by the fact that the word racism only appears twice, and in both instances referring to the time period of 1870-1920.

While slavery appears more often, it is often referred to either as just "one reason" for the Civil War or as an "economic system."

Research shows that the overwhelming predominance of Euro-American perspectives leads many Black, Indigenous, people of color (BIPOC) students to disengage from academics.

However, according to Katherine, we are "scandalously misinformed."

Kersten goes further and makes the accusation that the work the committee is engaged in is "directly contradicting the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.'s colorblind ideal." Katherine's interpretation of history is incorrect, and is a grave mischaracterization of King, who dreamed of a United States in which all people were created equal and were not judged by the color of their skin. King never advocated for our Black and brown communities to abdicate and erase our diversity or similarly not recognize and acknowledge whiteness.

Race has always mattered in this country, from the moment the Founding Fathers wrote that all men are created equal and in the same breath counted enslaved Black people as only partially human. Asserting that race does not matter is privilege. It not only dismisses the current lived experiences of people of color but also trivializes the centuries of legalized discrimination faced by people of color throughout American history.

Additionally, Katherine takes issue with the fact that "The new standards include a strikingly disproportionate emphasis on Indigenous people [who] make up about 1% of Minnesota's population, but nearly 20% of the committee."

To complain about the higher percentage of Native Americans on the committee this year but not to complain about the historic underrepresentation of Indigenous leaders on the many boards, commissions and councils in Minnesota in years past is not only a cowardly move but also a hypocritical one.

Kersten concludes her rant with the assertion that we are "rewriting history," but hasn't given one example of a new inclusion that's false. Instead she lists items that she thinks have no value in the study of American history, one of them being *partus sequitur ventrem*, a legal doctrine that stated children born of a mother then in a state of slavery follow the condition of their mother.

This 1622 edict was a revolutionary departure from English tradition, which had stated that citizenship was passed down through fathers. The ramifications of this change not only shaped

the progress of slavery, as it allowed for a continuous supply of enslaved people, but also deprived thousands of Black people of citizenship and political power, the effects of which are still felt today.

Gov. Tim Walz stated that "Minnesota consistently ranks highly for our public schools, innovation and opportunity, and happiness — if you're white. If you're not, the opposite is true.

"Systemic racism must be addressed if we are to secure justice, peace and order for all Minnesotans."

Teaching systemic racism isn't indoctrination. Showing our BIPOC students that their people are resilient and have made lasting impressions on history isn't being "woke." It's being honest and owning our history, "warts and all." It is also just one of the first steps we are making to right the many wrongs of our education system.

Education, as much as we like to call it the great equalizer, doesn't exist in a vacuum. The work to create a more equitable system doesn't end with the social studies standards — in fact it is just the beginning.

Aaliyah Hodge is a Black woman and a member of the Minnesota Social Studies Standards Committee.

Counterpoint: Public school students aren't learning the 'wrong' thing

In public schools throughout Minnesota they're learning too little of anything at all, and changing social studies standards won't help.

By Gary Marvin Davison

FEBRUARY 17, 2021 — 5:51PM



ISTOCK

MCAs are just one way to test students' knowledge.

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There is a poignant and farcical commonality to the opposing views on Minnesota social studies standards expressed by Katherine Kersten ("Woke revolution looms for schools," [Feb. 7](#)) and by Aaliyah Hodge ("Why we need new social studies standards," [Feb. 11](#)).

Neither standards that give more attention to the abuse of Native Americans and other minority groups in American history — as advocated by Hodge — nor the currently prevailing, more traditional standards — dating to 2004 and touted by Kersten — will be taught in the classrooms of most Minnesota school districts, including the Minneapolis Public Schools.

The standards created in 2004 were consistent with the movement at the time for measurable, objective indicators of student performance. They were consonant with the goals of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), a bipartisan piece of federal legislation supported by both Republican Speaker of the House John Boehner and Democratic stalwart Sen. Ted Kennedy. The idea was to induce attention to fundamental math and reading skills while establishing more rigorous curricula across the liberal arts, imparted to students of all races.

But the forces of both the left (including teachers unions and the education establishment) and right (including one-time NCLB backers among Republicans who succumbed to pressure from constituencies that objected to federal intervention in local and state curriculum standards) eventually worked toward the demise of NCLB and associated standards.

As the Minnesota education establishment's embarrassment mounted over massive student failure on the objective Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments (MCAs), opposition to the MCAs and the standards increased. Nonwhite and lower-income students performed particularly badly, but even students from school districts typically overhyped for educational quality, such as Edina and Minnetonka, performed poorly on a mathematics MCA that students in Taiwan and Singapore would find laughable for lack of rigor.

The Star Tribune Editorial Board joined the chorus for jettisoning NCLB, which died a slow death and gave way to a kind of federal NCLB-lite dubbed the Every Students Succeed Act (ESSA) and on the state level to ineffective programs such as World's Best Work Force (WBWF) and Regional Centers of Excellence (RCE), emanating from the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE).

More important, resistance at the classroom level to Minnesota's state standards was ongoing. The standards were never taught in the Minneapolis Public Schools and most other school districts, nor were students ever prepared by aggressive provision of the grade-level skills necessary to perform well on the MCAs.

Education Minnesota and local affiliates such as the Minneapolis Federation of Teachers (MFT) opposed the standards and the MCAs from the moment of their introduction. And even had there been an inclination in the education establishment to impart the knowledge and skills associated with the standards, most teachers are incapable of doing so because of low knowledge bases and pedagogical incompetence traceable to teacher training programs.

As for themes pertinent to the experiences of Native Americans and other minority groups as advocated in new standards touted by Hodge — those will not be implemented either. The opportunity exists now for teachers to present such material to students; they do not do so.

Prospective elementary school teachers receive the most academically insubstantial training of any students matriculating on a college or university campus. Few secondary teachers have mastery over the subject matter for which they are formally certified. Teachers are deficient in

knowledge pertinent to history, literature, fine arts, mathematics and the natural sciences. They have no mastery of the history, literature and fine arts of Native Americans, African Americans, Latino/Latinas, Hmong or Somali students. Their main pedagogical recourse is to distribute boring worksheets, assign individual and group projects with little background information, and to show videos that go unexplained and undiscussed.

Thus, the aims of both Kersten and Hodge will be unattained. Kersten's appeal for the presentation of factual knowledge, chronological events and people, and Hodge's call for attention to nonwhite cultures, are poignant for the passion exhibited by both writers. But the farcical nature of the system assures that neither knowledge-intensive curriculum nor ethnic-specific themes will be presented in the classrooms of the Minneapolis Public Schools and most other locally centralized school districts.

Reform will never be accomplished through national or state processes in the United States, given the nation's mania for local control. The necessary overhaul of curriculum and teacher quality must become the goal of a locally centralized school district that can then become the model for such change.

My own efforts are to induce such an overhaul at the Minneapolis Public Schools.

Gary Marvin Davison is director of the New Salem Educational Initiative in north Minneapolis. He blogs at newsalemeducation.blogspot.com