

April 16th, 2014

Dear Colleague,

After months of considerable deliberation with teachers, curriculum leaders, department heads, as well as elementary, middle, and high school principals, I'm ready to announce our plan for the realignment of Social Studies courses in grades 4-10. I want to reiterate that this process has given me considerable pride to say that I'm a Social Studies teacher in Rockingham County. Despite the number of personal stakes involved, everyone has been exceedingly professional throughout this process. Regardless of our individual positions, it is clearly evident that our discussion has been guided by a commitment to what's best for our students. I certainly would have preferred to make this decision sooner, but I believe that we were compelled to consider the SOL reform bill (HB930) in order to make the most informed decision for the long term. Despite the future gains of our realignment plan, I do recognize that there will be transitions that will have to occur in the short term. None of us take that fact lightly, but I would not be willing to make this decision if there were not a clear consensus from Social Studies leadership to move forward. I greatly appreciate everyone's work, and I rest well knowing that students will be better served by our decision.

As we all know, the vast majority of students in Rockingham County do not take a Social Studies class in the 10th grade because Advanced Diploma students earn a high school credit by taking World Geography in middle school. While this course offering has the benefit of creating more room in the high school schedule, it also creates a 10th grade gap in the high school Social Studies curriculum. Offering World Geography in the 8th grade also collectively shifts Civics, U.S. History (Part II), and U.S. History (Part I) down a level to 7th, 6th, and 5th grades (respectively). I agree with many Civics teachers that their curriculum is more appropriately suited for the 8th grade. I also agree with many 5th grade teachers that the U.S. History (Part I) curriculum is much more appropriate for the middle school "period" structure. Despite the recent elimination of this SOL test, most 5th grade teachers still feel that U.S. History (Part I) is misplaced in elementary school because of the extensive level of content information. Within the context of the elementary school schedule, U.S. History (Part I) has to compete with the demands of teaching Reading, Writing, Math, and Science as well. In a self-contained classroom of this nature, it is extraordinarily difficult for an elementary school teacher to find adequate time to teach such a content-heavy curriculum in depth. Given that 4th grade teachers share this same struggle with Social Studies, the Virginia Studies curriculum is going to be divided between 4th and 5th grade in order to relieve the content pressure on both grade levels. This will give elementary teachers more curricular freedom and enable them to add greater depth to their history instruction. For example, a few principals and teachers have expressed interest in the addition of local Shenandoah Valley history and the respective communities that surround their school. For instance, Elkton and the establishment of Shenandoah National Park, Dayton and General Sheridan's campaign to burn the Valley during the Civil War, Broadway and the assassination of Elder John Kline by Confederate partisans, etc. This structure will also create a more natural grade-to-grade sequence in the curriculum by using Virginia history (grades 4 & 5) and U.S. History (grades 6 & 7) to prepare students to learn about the corresponding levels of government that will be addressed in 8th grade Civics.

This realignment plan will take three years to fully implement, so high schools will not be impacted until the Fall of 2016. While Social Studies leadership was divided over which plan to choose, there was a very clear consensus that either plan was preferable to the status quo. There was an equally strong consensus that all students should have geography as an integral part of their Social Studies education. Therefore, World Geography will be added to the high school Social Studies curriculum. The great majority of students will likely take World Geography in the 9th grade and World History II in the 10th grade. Not only is the test for World History II written on a 10th grade level, but 10th grade World History II will also serve as a natural transition into 11th grade U.S. History. However, certain advanced students interested in 10th grade AP Human Geography can elect to take World History II as a 9th grader.

I don't want to discount the value of World History I (WHI), but I agree that Geography should get greater emphasis in our current course structure. To be honest, I can't justify a Social Studies education for a Standard Diploma student that is limited to U.S. Government, U.S. History, and Pre-Columbian history. Not exposing our standard students to the diversity of the world around them would be doing them a great disservice. In many cases, these students in particular are in dire need of that exposure. I also believe that our current tracking arrangement in WHI needs to be addressed as well. However, I also recognize that teachers have invested time into WHI, and many enjoy teaching it. Therefore, I think WHI should remain in the curriculum, but as an *elective* class that students choose to take. Our sections of WHI will certainly go down, but WHI originated as an elective course, and I think that it will likely survive as one in the future.

I'm excited about this transition, and I'm confident that our students will be better served by these changes. While I firmly believe that this places students in a better position to be successful, I also recognize that it asks some of our colleagues to make difficult adjustments to new classes and/or grade levels. It is incumbent upon all of us to provide support to these colleagues as they face these challenges. It's not only important that we share valuable instructional materials that will ease their transition, but we also need to provide professional encouragement and moral support as well. I look forward to beginning this process next Fall in grades 4 and 7. Please refer to the table below for a visual layout of the year-to-year realignment plan.

With esteem,

Beau Dickenson

Social Studies Realignment (Grades 4-10)

**No Civics or
VA Studies SOL*

**Full Implementation*

<i>School Year:</i>	<i>Current Year</i>	<i>2014-15</i>	<i>2015-16</i>	<i>2016-17</i>	<i>2017-18</i>
4 th Grade	Virginia Studies	<u>Virginia Studies (Part I)</u>	<u>Virginia Studies (Part I)</u>	<u>Virginia Studies (Part I)</u>	<u>Virginia Studies (Part I)</u>
5 th Grade	U.S. History (Part I)	<u>U.S. History (Transition Year)</u>	<u>Virginia Studies (Part II)</u>	<u>Virginia Studies (Part II)</u>	<u>Virginia Studies (Part II)</u>
6 th Grade	U.S. History (Part II)	U.S. History (Part II)	<u>U.S. History (Part I)</u>	<u>U.S. History (Part I)</u>	<u>U.S. History (Part I)</u>
7 th Grade	Civics	<u>7th Grade Social Studies</u>	<u>7th Grade Social Studies</u>	<u>U.S. History (Part II)</u>	<u>U.S. History (Part II)</u>
8 th Grade	World Studies <u>OR</u> World Geography	World Studies <u>OR</u> World Geography	<u>Civics</u>	<u>Civics</u>	<u>Civics</u>
High School					
9 th Grade	World History I <u>OR</u> World History II	World History I <u>OR</u> World History II	World History I <u>OR</u> World History II	<u>World Geography</u>	<u>World Geography</u>
10 th Grade					<u>World History II</u>
11 th Grade	U.S. History	U.S. History	U.S. History	U.S. History	U.S. History
12 th Grade	U.S. Government	U.S. Government	U.S. Government	U.S. Government	U.S. Government

