

April 16, 2014

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 10<sup>th</sup> 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 10<sup>th</sup> grade gap in the high school Social Studies curriculum. Offering World Geography in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade also collectively shifts Civics, U.S. History (Part II), and U.S. History (Part I) down a level to 7<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, and 5<sup>th</sup> grades (respectively). I agree with many Civics teachers that their curriculum is more appropriately suited for the 8<sup>th</sup> grade. I also agree with many 5<sup>th</sup> 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 5<sup>th</sup> 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 4<sup>th</sup> grade teachers share this same struggle with Social Studies, the Virginia Studies curriculum is going to be divided between 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grades 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 8<sup>th</sup> grade Civics.

The most difficult aspect of this decision was the realization that World Geography is a misplaced class that has been embraced by many 8<sup>th</sup> grade teachers. I'm certainly not comfortable moving a class away from a teacher who has a passion for the subject. However, my conscience refuses to ignore the fact that the placement of World Geography in 8<sup>th</sup> grade puts students and teachers at a disadvantage in grades 5, 6, & 7. The creation of a non-SOL Geography class in 7<sup>th</sup> grade was strongly considered in order to ease the disruption to the middle school schedule. However, many teachers expressed a concern that this would not address the original goal of realigning our curriculum with surrounding school divisions. In addition to ignoring legitimate problems that would persist in elementary school, a 7<sup>th</sup> grade Geography class would also disrupt the natural sequencing of U.S. History (I & II) into 8<sup>th</sup> grade Civics. I also agree with many middle school teachers that believe that U.S. History I & II are courses that should be paired together in the same building. Distributing Part I across several elementary schools that feed into a single middle school makes collaboration between Part I and Part II a nearly impossible task.

Therefore, I believe that U.S. History (Part I) in 6<sup>th</sup> grade, U.S. History (Part II) in 7<sup>th</sup> grade, and Civics in 8<sup>th</sup> grade is the most appropriate structure of middle school Social Studies classes. This realignment will begin this coming Fall as we take steps to move Civics from 7<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> grade. However, it is important to note that moving a class up a grade level requires that it not be taught for a year. **Therefore, 7<sup>th</sup> grade will teach a temporary class for the next two years in order to expedite the realignment process. However, if you examine the table below, you will see that this course is currently titled "7<sup>th</sup> grade Social Studies." This is a certainly a temporary title until 7<sup>th</sup> grade teachers and I have the opportunity to discuss this curriculum in greater detail. In the near future, I will be forming a committee of interested Middle School teachers to further develop this curriculum over the summer. Please don't hesitate to contact me if you are interested in this opportunity.** 8<sup>th</sup> grade World Geography and 6<sup>th</sup> grade U.S. History (Part II) will both be taught next year as usual. However, in the Fall of 2015, U.S. History (Part I) will be taught in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade and Civics will be taught in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade. In the Fall of 2016, U.S. History (Part II) will move to the 7<sup>th</sup> grade and the realignment in middle school will be complete. Please refer to the table below for a visual layout of the year-to-year realignment plan.

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.

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 <sup>th</sup> 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 <sup>th</sup> 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 <sup>th</sup> 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 <sup>th</sup> Grade	Civics	<u>7<sup>th</sup> Grade Social Studies</u>	<u>7<sup>th</sup> Grade Social Studies</u>	<u>U.S. History (Part II)</u>	<u>U.S. History (Part II)</u>
8 <sup>th</sup> Grade	World Studies <u>OR</u> World Geography	World Studies <u>OR</u> World Geography	<u>Civics</u>	<u>Civics</u>	<u>Civics</u>
<b>High School</b>					
9 <sup>th</sup> 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 <sup>th</sup> Grade					<u>World History II</u>
11 <sup>th</sup> Grade	U.S. History	U.S. History	U.S. History	U.S. History	U.S. History
12 <sup>th</sup> Grade	U.S. Government	U.S. Government	U.S. Government	U.S. Government	U.S. Government

