

November 15, 2022

Virginia Department of Education

James Monroe Building
101 N. 14th Street
Richmond, VA 23219

Re: History and Social Science Standards of Learnings (SOLs)

Dear Governor Youngkin, Secretary Guidera, and Superintendent Balow:

We, the undersigned organizations, write to provide our feedback for Virginia's History and Social Science Standards of Learning (SOL) for entry into the official record.

As community based organizations representing diverse communities of Virginia, we are immensely disappointed that the Superintendent of Public Instruction has unduly delayed the process of revising the History and Social Science SOLs. We are equally alarmed that the delay in part is due to the Superintendent bringing in new unqualified outside actors, such as Michigan-based Hillsdale College, to the History and Social Science SOL review at this point in the process.

The first draft provided to the Board of Education on August 17th, 2022 included significant review and feedback. This included feedback from a practitioner steering committee, a historian steering committee, an external student advisory committee, an educator committee, an external museum and organization committee, an external historian and professor committee and an external parent advisory & CTE/business leader committee. Additionally, over 5,000 public comments were submitted, with representation from communities across the Commonwealth. There is no doubt the response was representative of Virginia and that there was ample time for individuals and organizations to share their vision for social studies education in Virginia. Since then, an additional 6,000 public comments have been submitted in response to this draft with the standards and curricula framework.

[As James Fedderman, President of the Virginia Education Association has pointedly shared,](#) delays have a deleterious effect on educators and students because they limit the time educators and local school divisions have to prepare for implementation of the standards for the 2023-2024 school year, including the time needed to align curriculum and lesson plans to standards. It is unacceptable to not provide educators with clear answers to the process and timeline related to the social studies standards.

We are also alarmed by the sudden and unexpected involvement of Hillsdale College, which has published a curriculum that has faced criticism from renowned historians for inaccuracies and biases. The [American Historical Association](#) (AHA), which is comprised of over 11,500 professional historians, urged the South Dakota Board of Education to not incorporate Hillsdale's Social Studies Standard recommendations as they would "do significant harm" to students in their state, and "harm students' employment prospects." This is in large part due to the curriculum including inaccuracies, such as

claiming that [Dr. Martin Luther King](#) "appealed to the individual conscience and not the force of law to bring about a color-blind society," and suggesting George Washington "freed all the slaves in his family estate" by the end of his life. The Hillsdale curriculum also includes former President Donald Trump's "1776 Commission" as a resource for teachers and students. The 1776 Commission has been [widely panned](#) by academics (such as the American Anthropological Association, American Sociological Association, National Council on Public History, National Coalition for History and more) as "hastily written" without "any consultation with professional historians of the United States" and for a lack of factual accuracy.

Hillsdale College's consultation in other states, such as Arizona and South Dakota, has also faced criticism for not actually providing feedback on social studies standards, but instead [creating a curriculum](#). This is highly concerning, as it calls the established process and protocol of the review process into question. A poorly designed and historically inaccurate curriculum that runs counter to the established review process should not be introduced at this time.

In addition to the content inaccuracies, education experts have expressed dire concerns about the 1776 Curriculum's pedagogical framework, which is lacking in inquiry, critical thinking and analysis of primary sources. The [National Council for the Social Studies](#) (NCSS) centers inquiry "at the heart of social studies". NCSS has further clarified its position on [the development process for state social studies standards](#), and continues to call for a transparent and public process supported by the expertise of educators and scholars in the social studies disciplines. Yet, Hillsdale College undermines the research and data informed framework endorsed by NCSS by discarding inquiry in favor of rote memorization. This also runs counter to Virginia's House Bill 895 and Senate Bill 336, which directed the Board of Education to develop and implement a profile of a Virginia graduate, identifying the knowledge and skills that students should attain during high school in order to be successful. In developing the profile, due consideration was given to the "5 C's": critical thinking, creative thinking, collaboration, communication and citizenship. One cannot achieve this profile without inquiry.

Finally, we are highly concerned that Hillsdale College, a private liberal arts college in Michigan, has the potential to dictate and influence what Virginia educators teach and what Virginia students learn. With a plethora of world-class institutions, historians and subject-matter experts in Virginia, there is no reason to introduce an outside actor with no previous involvement in Virginia's education system at this late stage in the review process. Doubly concerning is Larry Arnn, President of Hillsdale College, [denigrating teachers](#), saying they "are trained in the dumbest parts of the dumbest colleges in the country," and that "anyone" can teach. Introducing an outside actor who has a disdain for educators signals to Virginia educators that they are not valued or respected. We cannot afford to send this message at a time when there is a critical teacher shortage, and while our educators continue to do the difficult work of educating our students through challenging times.

We urge you to continue the review process without any additional delays, display transparency with next steps, and to not allow Hillsdale College and other unqualified outside actors with political agendas to influence the process at the detriment of our educators, students, parents and community.

Sincerely,

L. Sookyung Oh

Director

Hamkae Center

Anisha Singh

Executive Director

The Sikh Coalition

4 Public Education

The 1882 Foundation

ACLU People Power Fairfax

African Communities Together

Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund (AALDEF)

Blacksburg Chapter of Dear Asian Youth

The Commonwealth Institute for Fiscal Analysis

Edu-Futuro

Fairfax County NAACP

Just Neighbors Ministry

League of Women Voters of Virginia

Legal Aid Justice Center

National Council for the Social Studies

Norfolk Federation of Teachers

Pride Liberation Project

Progress Virginia

ReEstablish Richmond

Senate of Virginia - Senator J. Boysko

Senate of Virginia - Senator G. Hashmi

Senate of Virginia - Senator M. Locke

Stop AAPI Hate

Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Fairfax

Virginia Education Association

Virginia House of Delegates - Delegate M. Lopes Maldonado

Virginia House of Delegates - Delegate S. VanValkenburg

Virginia House of Delegates - Delegate S. Rasoul

Virginia House of Delegates - Delegate B. Sewell

Virginia House of Delegates - Delegate S. Simonds

Virginia House of Delegates - Delegate I. Shin

Virginia House of Delegates - Delegate K. Tran

Virginia Organizing

Cc: Dr. Christine Harris, Director, Office of Humanities
Christonya Brown, History & Social Science Coordinator
Emily Webb, Director of Board Relations
Board of Education

