

BESE Remarks May 22, 2018

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My name is Christopher Martell. I am a professor of social studies education at Boston University. I was also a member of the DESE Framework Review Panel.

I am here to strongly urge the Board to approve the 2018 revised History and Social Science Curriculum Framework and included standards.

Before becoming a professor at BU, I was a high school social studies teacher in Massachusetts for 11 years, mostly at Framingham High School. I taught under past frameworks. I can confidently state that this framework is a substantial improvement from previous versions. I truly believe that this document will make Massachusetts a national leader in social studies education. Its emphasis on democratic citizenship and inquiry is groundbreaking. I am particularly impressed by the organization of the standards around powerful questions that students are expected to answer.

I would also urge the Board to next reinstate the History and Social Science MCAS. I am someone who generally errs on the side of less, rather than more, testing. However, through my work with preservice teachers, I regularly visit elementary, middle, and high schools across the state. To be honest, without an MCAS, we have seen an amazing decline in the amount of social studies being taught, especially at the elementary and middle school levels. This is particularly evident in our state's urban school districts, where we know the civics achievement gap is greater and students' social studies knowledge is directly related to their civic and social opportunities as adults.

Finally, despite my strong support for these standards, I would like to highlight one area of concern. I would ask the Board and DESE to consider a minor revision before the final framework is approved. There are several important people and events missing. They include: the Los Angeles riots, Hurricane Katrina, Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, and the Black Lives Matter movement. While this revised framework better represents the diversity of the people of Massachusetts, the United States, and our world, it does not include a discussion of race relations since the 1970s. It may leave students with an impression that the civil rights movement ended 50 years ago and that the election of Barack Obama is the last race-related event.

I have an easy fix. I would encourage stronger wording on the high school U.S. history standard #37, which currently focuses almost exclusively on the election of Barack Obama. Instead, I suggest that a revised #37 might look something like:

Analyze major events related to race relations in the United States, including the 1992 Los Angeles riots, the government response to Hurricane Katrina, the Black Lives Matter movement, and the significance of the election of Barack Obama as the nation's first African American president...

Thank you again for your consideration of the revised History and Social Science Framework. Massachusetts is currently a national leader in math, science, and literacy standards. I am confident that this framework will also make us a leader in social studies standards and help history and civics gain more prominence and relevance in our schools.