



Arlington  
Public  
Schools



# Social Studies

## BRIEFING REPORT

APRIL 2021

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# SOCIAL STUDIES

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The APS Social Studies Program serves to engage students in meaningful and challenging experiences that will allow students to understand the relevance of history and the social sciences and to become informed, responsible, and reasoned citizens of a democratic society and an interdependent world.

## MAJOR SERVICES PROVIDED

- Preparing each student to succeed in a diverse, changing world through curriculum and instruction that emphasizes critical thinking, creative thinking, collaboration, communication, and citizenship, as well as school experiences responsive to each student's talents, interests, and challenges.
- Developing, revising, and enhancing curriculum and instructional programs to support rigorous learning experiences aligned with state standards.
- Providing students and teachers with access to technology and other resources that support high-quality social studies instruction.
- Engaging teachers in professional learning that focuses on best practices in pedagogy and skills that emphasize critical thinking, creative thinking, collaboration, communication and citizenship.
- Promoting high-quality instruction through observation and feedback cycles for teachers.
- Monitoring instruction and program implementation through classroom walkthroughs and data analysis.
- Building effective relationships with parents and the community so they know about and actively support the education of our students.

## BRIGHT SPOTS

### EXPANSION OF ACCESS TO DOCUMENT BASED QUESTIONS (DBQS)

In the 2020-21 school year, we expanded access to the DBQ online platform so that all students and teachers, grades K-12, have access to the online platform as well as hard copy materials. The APS Social Studies has also expanded professional learning opportunities to include elementary teachers. This training helps teachers provide more rigorous instruction through primary source analysis and provides one method of performance assessment.

### PROFESSIONAL LEARNING IN THE INQUIRY DESIGN MODEL

All social studies teachers received initial training in the inquiry design model to provide a foundation in designing inquiries that support critical thinking and student exploration of content through skills. This model allows for student exploration of content, development of skills, and rigorous differentiation.

### DEVELOPMENT OF LATIN AMERICAN STUDIES CURRICULUM

In the Fall of 2020, APS launched a Latin American Studies course. In the 2020-21 school year, the course is running at Wakefield High School. The course is being developed by the Social Studies Office and a teacher at Wakefield High School. In this course, students will learn about Latin American cultures, their political and economic structures, and their impact on the globalized world through a variety of lenses. This course is in the Program of Studies and will be available for all high schools for the 2021-22 school year.

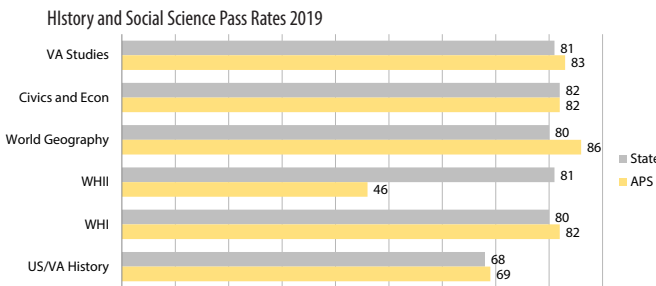
### APS TEACHERS INVOLVED IN WORK WITH VDOE

APS teachers, as well as the Social Studies Supervisor, are participating on the state steering committees and work groups around the development of the 2022 Social Studies Standards and the development of performance assessments at the state level.

## DATA THAT PROVIDES INSIGHT

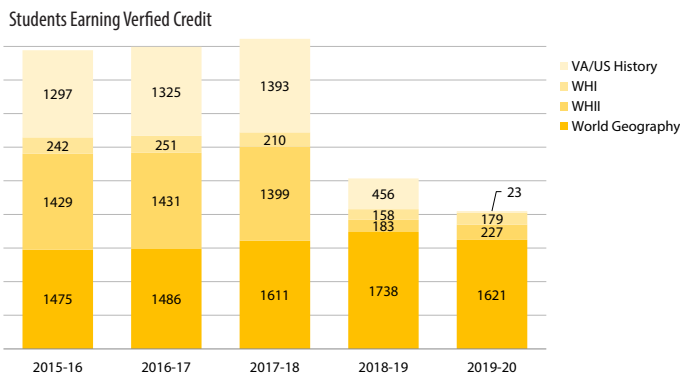
### VDOE Standards of Learning in History and Social Science

The SOL assessments were not administered in spring of the 2019-20 school year due to the COVID-19 school closure. The data below is from the 2019 SOL administration. Arlington Public Schools meets or outperforms or matches the state in five of the six social studies SOL tests. In one course, WHI, APS pass rates were below the state pass rate. This course is taken by a small number of APS students as students are only required to have two courses in either World Geography or World History to meet the graduation requirements for an advanced Diploma. As APS offers World Geography in 8th grade and World History II in 9th grade, many students do not take World History I. Instead they opt to take other courses such as AP World History or Economics and Personal Finance. Despite the lower overall pass rates on the WHI exam, students from all sub-groups outform the same sub-groups at the state level.



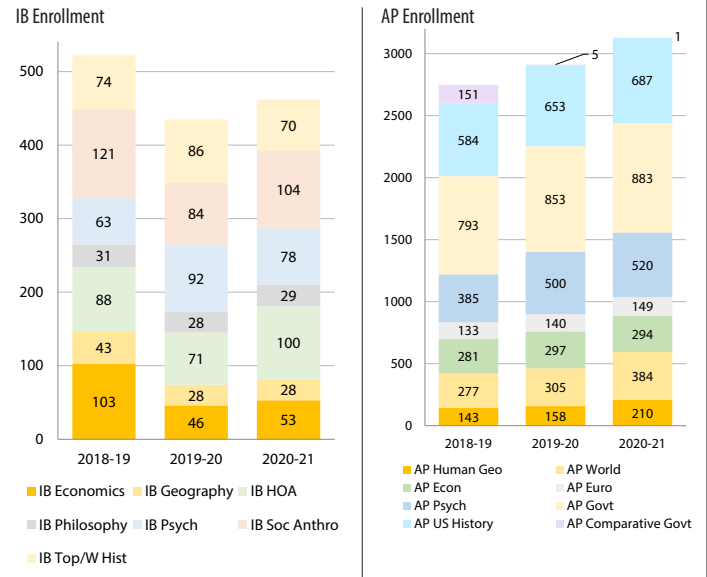
### Students Taking SOL Exams in History and Social Science

Students entering 9th grade in the 2018-19 school year and beyond, now only need one verified credit in History and Social Science to meet the graduation requirements. This means that fewer students are taking SOL exams in all History and Social Science courses for WHII, WHI, and VA/US History. This has provided APS social studies teachers with more flexibility to use a balanced assessment approach that covers a variety of types of assessments on which students can show mastery of skills and content in a variety of ways. World Geography is a course that all 8th grade students take. Allowing students to earn their verified credit in History and Social Science in 8th grade also provides additional flexibility to students as they enter high school and determine what coursework to take. In the 2019-20 school year, verified credits were awarded to students who were enrolled in, and passed, a course for which there would have been an SOL assessment.



### AP/IB Course Enrollment

Enrollment numbers in AP Social Studies courses continue to rise. After a decrease in enrollment for the 2019-20 school year, the enrollment in IB Social Studies classes increased by 6.2% for the 2020-21 school year.

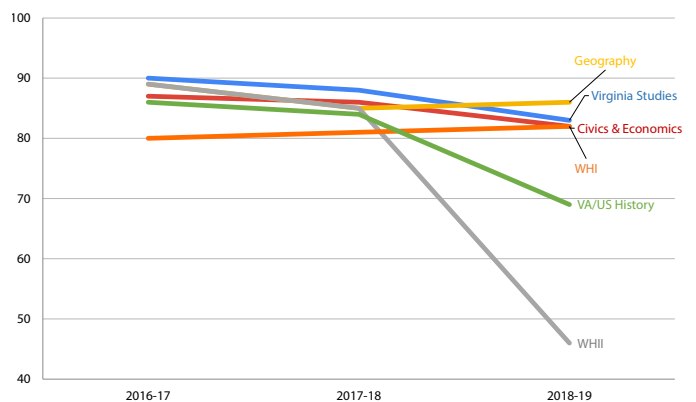


### CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

#### Supporting Students in Earning Verified Credits

In looking at the three year trend data, pass rates for most courses are staying relatively steady. However, World History II and VA/US History are trending significantly downward as a result of the reduction in the number of verified credits needed for graduation. Starting with the 9th grade class of 2018-19, students are only required to have one verified credit in History and Social Science in order to graduate. Most students in APS earn their verified credit in 8th Grade World Geography. As a result, smaller numbers of students are taking the WHII and VA/US SOL exams. The students who are taking the exams either transferred from outside APS or have not yet earned a verified credit during previous attempts.

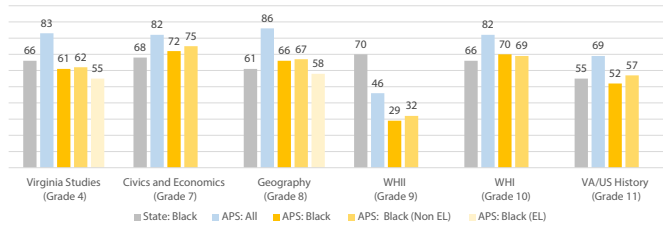
3-Year Trend SOL Data for History & Social Science



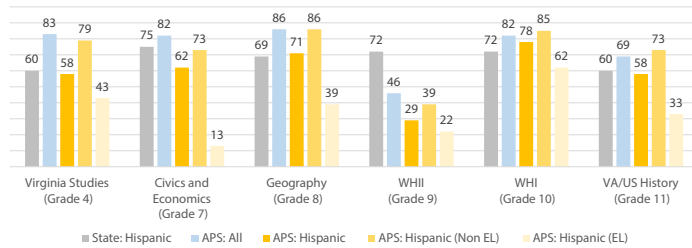
## Opportunity Gap Data

In 2018-19, SOL pass rates for the sub-groups of Hispanic Students, Black Students, Students with Disabilities, English Learners, and Economically Disadvantaged were lower than the overall APS pass rates. In World Geography, where many students have their first chance to earn a verified credit, the APS sub-groups scores are equal to or higher than the state sub-groups scores. In World History I, the APS sub-groups scores outperform the state scores for all sub-groups. One area in the data that provides some additional insight is that Non-EL Hispanic students perform as well as, or better than the overall APS pass rate in 3 of the 4 high school end-of-course SOL exams.

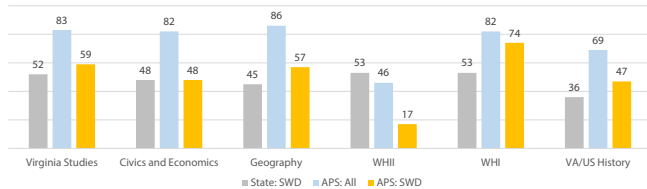
2019 SOL Pass Rates: Black Students



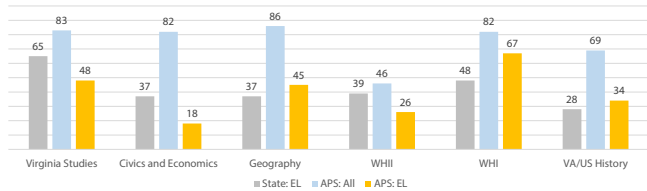
2019 SOL Pass Rates: Hispanic Students



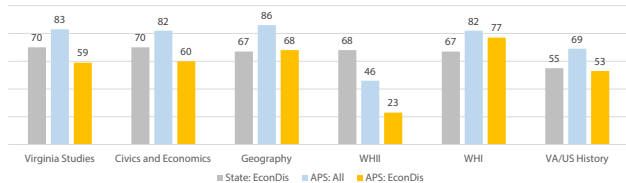
2019 SOL Pass Rates: Students with Disabilities



2019 SOL Pass Rates: English Learners



2019 SOL Pass Rates: Economically Disadvantaged



## Addressing the Opportunity Gap

The Social Studies Office will continue to collaborate across content offices, as well as with the Office of English Learners, Special Education, ATSS, and the Office of Equity and Excellence to work toward eliminating the opportunity gap for APS students. We will do this by:

- Shifting the emphasis of instruction from memorization of content to the development of skills. As this shift occurs in elementary schools, students will come to middle and high school prepared with the history and social science skills that they need to be successful in their coursework. The Social Studies Office is in the process of developing a series of rubrics, based on VDOE criteria, that will allow us to track the progress of student growth over time; both within and across grade levels.
- Ensuring that the written curricula that we are developing and revising are consistently taught by all schools within APS. This will allow for consistency of access for students, as well as consistent expectations and support for teachers and students in grades K-12.
- Purposefully working across content offices to ensure that the curriculum is inclusive and accessible to all students. The Social Studies Office has made a conscious effort to include teachers of English Learners, Special Education Teachers, Resource Teachers of the Gifted, Equity and Excellence Coordinators, and Librarians on recent curriculum development committees. We plan to continue this practice moving forward.
- Providing professional learning opportunities to teachers around grading for equity, using culturally responsive practices in the classroom, focusing on personalized learning, and differentiation.



## ONGOING WORK

### CURRICULUM REVISION AND IMPLEMENTATION

Beginning in the summer of 2018, teams of social studies teachers have met to review and revise the APS curriculum documents. A new 6th grade curriculum focused on skills based instruction and thematic connections, as well as an inquiry based Latin American Studies curriculum were implemented for the 2020-21 school year. We start work on a new inquiry based 7th grade Civics and Economics curriculum in April of 2021.

The Social Studies Office is part of the first group of content offices to participate in training on Dr. Gholdy Muhammad's Historically Responsive Literacy Framework. The office is working with a team of teachers and specialists to be trained in this model and is starting this work with the 4th grade Virginia Studies curriculum. We will review the curriculum maps and resources to ensure that they are inclusive of all students, especially those who have traditionally been marginalized by learning standards, school policies, and classroom practices. This process will be used to evaluate and revise the curriculum maps for all courses K-12.

The Social Studies Office is also working on integrating the recommendations from the African American History Education Commission into our curriculum documents. The curriculum documents will be updated and ready for the fall of 2020-21. The office is also planning professional learning to support teachers in learning about, and implementing, these changes.

### PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT AND STATE RUBRIC CRITERIA

The APS Social Studies Office, along with teams of teachers across content areas, continues to develop, refine, and implement performance assessments with scaffolds for students with specific learning needs. These assessments, available in grades K-12, are required as local alternate assessments in Grades 3, 6, and 7. For the 2020-21 school year, performance assessments are also being used in lieu of SOL assessments for Grade 4 Virginia Studies, Civics and Economics, and all courses that traditionally had an End-of-Course SOL (World Geography, WHII, WHI, VA/US History).

The Social Studies Office is also working to develop and implement rubrics for our performance assessments that are aligned with the VDOE scoring rubrics and skills progression criteria. All teachers who have students in one or more of the courses listed above, participated in scoring calibration training on Canvas in order to provide consistency in the use of the rubrics within teams and across schools.

## WHAT WE LEARNED

### LITERACY INTEGRATION

The Social Studies office plans to re-focus efforts on literacy integration, especially at the elementary level.

Aligning curriculum units in a purposeful way to combine content, social studies skills, and literacy skills will allow students and teachers to make natural connections across content areas. We have provided access to DBQ Project binders and online access grades K-12. The DBQ process supports the teaching of literacy skills through content. The elementary DBQ resources also allow for cross content connections. The Social Studies Office also plans to embed book lists, in addition to the trade books provided to grades K-3, into our elementary curriculum documents that will support the teaching of social studies content through reading. The Social Studies Office currently has one teacher specialist that supports social studies instruction in grades K-12. In order to more effectively support the needs of elementary teachers and students in the future the addition of a second teacher specialist, who could focus on elementary teaching and learning, would be ideal.



### LESSON LEARNED FROM PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENTS

The Social Studies Office in APS has been on the forefront of the development and use of performance assessments. This year, as we have increased the number of grades that are using performance assessments, not just for classroom use, but as an alternative to the SOL exam we have learned several things.

- The development of good performance based assessments takes time and resources. While we have a good bank of resources, we will need to continue to develop assessments that are developmentally and content appropriate.
- In order to successfully use performance based assessments, it will take continued time for training and scoring. In order for scoring to occur consistently across teachers and schools, it will be important to continue calibration training. This will allow for inter-rater reliability and consistency of experiences for students. As most assessments will need to be cross-scored, we have also learned that for this process to be successful, we will need to build in time for teachers to score, and cross score these



assessments. We do not want to encumber all of the time that is allocated for the professional learning of teachers with the scoring of assessments.

- The use of performance assessments highlights the power of collaboration among content offices. For the 2020-21 school year the Social Studies Office partnered with the ELA office to develop a common assessment that could be used to meet the Grade 8 Writing SOL exam requirements and a portion of the locally awarded verified credit process in World Geography. We regularly collaborate with the Gifted Services Office on the Document Based Question Process for performance assessment. Additionally, we worked with the Office of Special Education and the Office of English Learners to ensure we were implementing an assessment and processes that were accessible to all of our students. We also worked with Assessment and Information Services to determine the best way to do this work.
- The collection and scoring of performance assessments is time and labor intensive. VDOE has tasked school divisions with managing this process locally, unlike SOL assessments. In order to implement performance assessments on a wide scale, we will need integrated systems that allow us to collect and score responses, as well as report on the outcomes. We may be able to leverage Performance Matters for this work and will explore it further this spring and summer.
- There are budget implications for doing this work well. Not only do we need an integrated system but we will need time for the training and scoring needs that are required to do this work at high levels.

## MOVING FORWARD

The work of the Social Studies Office will include the following:

1. A review of all social studies curriculum maps and resources to ensure that they are inclusive and culturally responsive.
2. Implementation of the technical edits from the African American History Education Commission into APS curriculum maps and ensuring that teachers have the skill set they need to implement the changes.
3. Continuing the development of performance assessments and common rubrics that can be used as a growth measure to track students progress both within grade level and across grade levels.
4. Leveraging the lessons learned from the implementation of performance assessments this year to better the process moving forward.
5. Continuing to offer professional learning for teachers that will allow them to help students thrive in classrooms that are equitable and centered on their individual learning goals and needs.
6. Continued collaboration with other APS offices and community organizations in order to meet the needs of all of our students.