



**Vision for the College, Career, and Civic Life (C3)  
Framework for Inquiry in Social Studies State Standards**

Guidance for states to use in enhancing their standards for rigor in civics, economics, geography, and history in K-12 schools



The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) is a nonpartisan, nationwide, nonprofit organization of public officials who head departments of elementary and secondary education in the states, the District of Columbia, the Department of Defense Education Activity, and five U.S. extra-state jurisdictions. CCSSO provides leadership, advocacy, and technical assistance on major educational issues. The Council seeks member consensus on major educational issues and expresses their views to civic and professional organizations, federal agencies, Congress, and the public.



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## Introduction

In the advent of the development and mass adoption of the common core state standards for English language arts and mathematics, state and local agencies have now expressed a need to the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO or the Council) for assistance as they upgrade existing social studies standards to meet the practical goal of preparing young people for effective and successful participation in college, careers, and civic life.

The College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework, currently under development, will ultimately focus on the disciplinary and multidisciplinary concepts and practices that make up the process of investigation, analysis, and explanation which will be informative to states interested in upgrading their social studies standards. It will include descriptions of the structure and tools of the disciplines (civics, economics, geography, and history) as well as the habits of mind common in those disciplines. The C3 Framework will also include an inquiry arc—a set of interlocking and mutually supportive ideas that frame the ways students learn social studies content. This framing and background for standards development to be covered in C3 all point to the states' collective interest in students using the disciplines of civics, economics, geography, and history as they develop questions and plan investigations; apply disciplinary concepts and tools; gather, evaluate, and use evidence; and work collaboratively and communicate their conclusions.

The C3 Framework will focus primarily on inquiry and concepts, and will guide — not prescribe — the content necessary for a rigorous social studies program. CCSSO recognizes the critical importance of content to the disciplines within social studies and supports individual state leadership in selecting the appropriate and relevant content.

Like the common core state standards, the C3 Framework will be based on evidence and will aim at college and career readiness. As a core area in the K-12 curriculum, social studies prepares students for college and career including the disciplinary practices and literacies that are needed for college-level work in social studies academic courses and the critical thinking, problem solving, and collaborative skills needed for the workplace.

The C3 Framework also adds a third essential component to college and career readiness — civic life. Learning to be actively and responsibly engaged in civic life requires knowledge and experience; children learn to be citizens by working individually and together *as* citizens. An essential element of social studies education, therefore, is experiential — practicing the arts and habits of civic life collaboratively.

The forthcoming framework, to be released in 2013, will be a significant resource for all states to consider in their local processes for upgrading state social studies standards, rather than set standards for states to adopt. This document, *Vision for the College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Inquiry in Social Studies State Standards*, is designed to give states and other interested parties an understanding of how the C3 Framework is being developed and designed.

## **The Process for Developing the College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Inquiry in Social Studies State Standards**

The College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Inquiry in Social Studies State Standards is currently being developed through a state-led effort facilitated by CCSSO and supported by 15 professional organizations representing the 4 social studies content areas: civics, economics, geography, and history. The C3 Framework is being authored by known experts in the academic disciplines and social studies education in collaboration with classroom teachers, state department of education personnel, and professional organization representatives.

The C3 Framework was commissioned by the Social Studies Assessment, Curriculum, and Instruction (SSACI) collaborative of CCSSO. SSACI is made up of state-level social studies consultants, assessment experts, and administrative personnel within state departments of education. Members of SSACI are working together to create this evidence based framework that will provide guidance as they individually work to upgrade their respective state's current social studies standards.

Work on the C3 Framework began in 2010 with the development of an initial conceptual framework. The framework writers were selected in consultation with the participating professional associations. Feedback is being solicited throughout the process from stakeholders, including invitational reviews with educators, strategic partners, and critical friends.

The forthcoming C3 Framework will highlight the academic disciplines of civics, economics, geography, and history, while recognizing the critical need for flexibility and an interdisciplinary perspective. For example, literacies derived from the common core state standards in English language arts/literacy form an essential thread required by the actual demands of college, work, and civic life.

## The Inquiry Arc of the C3 Framework

At the heart of the C3 Framework is an inquiry arc — a set of interlocking and mutually supportive ideas that feature the four dimensions of informed inquiry in social studies: 1) developing questions and planning investigations; 2) applying disciplinary concepts and tools; 3) gathering, evaluating, and using evidence; and 4) working collaboratively and communicating conclusions.

Questioning is key to student learning. Therefore, Dimension 1 of the arc features the developing of questions and the planning of investigations. Through the C3 Framework, we advocate the use of questions as central to the teaching and learning process. With a robust question in mind, teachers and students determine the kind of content (Dimension 2) they need to create a plan to address their questions. This process is an artful balance where students access content knowledge to develop questions and pursue those questions using disciplinary concepts and structures. Dimension 3 of the inquiry arc turns toward the matter of evidence. Social studies is an evidence-based field so students need to learn how to work with evidence in order to develop explanations and to make persuasive arguments in support of their conclusions. Dimension 4 closes the inquiry arc by highlighting the ways students use to present their ideas (e.g., essays, debates, video productions), the venues in which they present their ideas (e.g., classrooms, school gatherings, public meetings), and the ways in which they work (e.g., individually, small groups, whole class).

Readiness for college, career, and civic life is as much about the experiences students have as it is about learning any particular set of content, concepts, or skills. Thus the learning environments that teachers create are critical to student success. Students will flourish to the extent that their independent and collaborative efforts are guided, supported, and honored.

A summary of the four dimensions follows. Literacies derived from the common core state standards in English language arts/literacy will be prominent in each dimension.

### Dimension 1. Developing Questions and Planning Investigations

**Summary:** Students will develop questions as they investigate societal issues, trends, and events.

Questions and the desire to answer them give life to inquiry and thus to the C3 Framework. Questions arise from innate curiosity and from efforts to make sense of new information. Compelling questions are suggestive, provocative, worth further exploration, and typically draw on multiple disciplines. Supporting questions are generally discipline specific and are intended to contribute knowledge and insights central to answering compelling questions. But questions are simply a starting place. The processes for conducting investigations into those questions must be planned with care and attention to the nature of inquiry, the scope of existing disciplinary knowledge, the role of evidence and the opportunities for collaboration, and communication of conclusions. Dimension 1 provides a framework for students to develop thoughtful questions and to carefully plan their investigations.

## **Dimension 2. Applying Disciplinary Concepts and Tools**

**Summary:** Students will analyze societal issues, trends, and events by applying concepts and tools from civics, economics, geography, and history.

The four core disciplines within social studies provide the intellectual context for studying how, over time, humans have interacted with each other and with the environment. Each of these disciplines offers a unique way of thinking and of organizing knowledge as well as systems for verifying knowledge. Dimension 2 focuses on the disciplinary concepts and tools students need to understand and apply as they study the content of state standards. These disciplinary ideas are the lenses students use in their investigations, and the consistent and coherent application of those lenses throughout the grades should lead to deep and enduring understanding.

### **Civics**

In a constitutional democracy with a strong civil society, civic engagement requires deliberating with others and participating in civic and democratic processes. People demonstrate civic engagement when they address public problems collaboratively and when they maintain, strengthen, and improve communities and societies. Thus, civics is, in part, the study of how people participate in governing society.

Civics is not limited to the study of politics and society; it also encompasses deliberation and participation in classrooms and schools, neighborhoods, groups, and organizations. In civics, students learn to contribute appropriately to public deliberations by citing evidence and explaining why their favored processes and outcomes are constitutional, legal, fair, practical, and/or effective. Their contributions may take many forms, ranging from personal testimony to abstract arguments. They also learn how to participate in other ways through voting, volunteering, and joining with others to take action to improve society. Civics enables students not only to study how others participate, but also to practice participating and taking action themselves.

### **Economics**

Economic decision-making requires that students have a keen understanding of the ways in which individuals, businesses, governments, and societies make decisions to allocate labor, capital, and natural resources among alternative uses. This economic reasoning process involves consideration of costs and benefits with the ultimate goal of making decisions that will enable individuals and societies to be as well off as possible. The study of economics provides students with the concepts and tools necessary for an economic way of thinking and helps students understand the interaction of buyers and sellers in markets, workings of the national economy, and interactions within the global marketplace. Armed with this knowledge, students will participate productively in the global economy.

### **Geography**

Geographic reasoning requires spatial and environmental perspectives, skill in asking and answering questions, and applying geographic representations including maps, imagery, and

geospatial technologies. A spatial perspective is characterized by questioning relationships among locations. Where is it? Why is it there? So what? An environmental perspective views humans as living in interdependent relationships within diverse environments among the planet's many species. Thinking geographically involves investigating spatial patterns and processes and comprehending that our world is composed of ecosystems at multiple scales interacting in complex webs of inter-relationships within nature and between nature and societies. Geographic reasoning brings societies and nature under the lens of spatial analysis for interpretations and explanations necessary to make decisions and solve problems.

## History

Historical thinking requires understanding and evaluating change and continuity over time and making appropriate use of historical evidence in answering questions and developing arguments about the past. It involves going beyond simply asking "What happened when?" to evaluating why and how events occurred and developments unfolded. It involves locating and assessing historical sources of many different types to understand the contexts of given historical eras and the perspectives of different individuals and groups. Historical thinking is a process of chronological reasoning, which means wrestling with issues of causality, connections, significance, and context with the goal of developing credible explanations of historical events and developments based on reasoned interpretation of evidence.

### Dimension 3. Gathering, Evaluating, and Using Evidence

**Summary:** Students will work toward conclusions about societal issues, trends, and events by collecting evidence and evaluating its usefulness in developing causal explanations.

Inquiry in social studies involves using information from a variety of sources and analyzing that information with increasingly sophisticated disciplinary strategies and tools. During inquiry, students draw upon different bodies of knowledge and different ways of knowing through an iterative process of gathering, analyzing, and applying information from various sources to make claims in response to compelling questions. As set forth in Dimension 2, disciplines provide sources of information and the strategies for analyzing increasingly complex ideas and sources. Dimension 3 provides structure for students to conduct analyses and formulate explanations, interpretations, and arguments that can inform and persuade a range of audiences. Dimension 3's emphasis on textual evidence will have explicit overlap and connection to the common core state standards in English language arts/literacy.

### Dimension 4. Working Collaboratively and Communicating Conclusions

**Summary:** Students will draw on knowledge and skills to work individually and collaboratively to conclude their investigations into societal issues, trends, and events.

The C3 Framework focuses on developing questions and investigations; applying disciplinary knowledge and concepts; and gathering, evaluating, and using evidence. Students also need to collaborate with others as they conduct and conclude their investigations and then communicate the results in public venues. These venues may range in size from the classroom to larger communities. Collaborative efforts may extend beyond making presentations to actual work on an

issue and may mean solving real-world problems. Dimension 4's focus on student collaboration and communicating conclusions also will have explicit overlap and connection to the common core state standards in English language arts/literacy.

### **Civic Engagement in C3 Framework**

The C3 Framework will describe the disciplinary and multidisciplinary concepts and practices in social studies that are needed for college, career, and civic life. Like the common core, the C3 Framework aims to enhance students' college and career readiness, and in addition, seeks explicitly to prepare students for an active and responsible civic life. A fundamental purpose of education in the United States is to prepare young people for civic life, and social studies is especially valuable for that purpose. The concepts and practices described in the C3 Framework are critical for civic life, including questioning, analyzing information, making evidence-based arguments, and collaborating.

Active and responsible citizens identify and analyze public problems; deliberate with other people about how to define and address issues; take constructive, collaborative action; reflect on their actions; create and sustain groups; and influence institutions both large and small. They vote, serve on juries when called, follow the news and current events, and participate in voluntary groups and efforts. Teaching students to be able to act in these ways — as citizens — significantly enhances preparation for college and career. Many of the same skills that are needed for active and responsible citizenship — working effectively with other people, deliberating and reasoning quantitatively about issues, following the news, and forming and sustaining groups — are also crucial to success in the 21<sup>st</sup> century workplace and in college.

Civic engagement is both an excellent means of learning social studies and an important outcome of social studies as a whole. As Aristotle first argued, learning to be an active and responsible citizen requires experience. The C3 Framework will describe a system of disciplinary inquiry in social studies that supports such experiences. As students inquire and communicate the results of their work, they are practicing the arts and habits of meaningful, successful civic life.