

May 15, 2023

Chair Bird, Vice-Chair Fowler, Ranking Member Robinson, and Members of the House Primary and Secondary Education Committee:

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Nancy Patterson. I am a Professor of Social Studies Education at Bowling Green State University and a 20-year veteran of social studies education. I have taught undergraduate introductory and senior methods courses as well as graduate courses. I also have served as the social studies curriculum coordinator at BGSU throughout this time. As an educational researcher, I study schools as microcosms of democracy, with a focus on student and teacher views of their First Amendment Rights. I speak to you today as a concerned public educator and committed US citizen. Thank you to the committee for the time you have invested in this vital topic. In my view, there is no more important topic today than social studies curriculum, and state-of-the-art teacher of social studies teachers are essential now more than ever.

Today, I am testifying as an Opponent of House Bill 103. I would like to respond specifically to the choice of curriculum named in the bill that the writers of the bill are proposing to replace the current Ohio Learning Standards for social studies. I am convinced that the proposed *American Birthright Standards* if adopted for Ohio's young citizens are sure to have unintended negative impacts on the state of our democracy.

The educational philosopher John Dewey has argued that democracy is not just an ideal and set of principles for those in government; rather, it is a set of values that goes beyond the courthouses and legislatures. It is a set of skills that we practice at work and at play, in our homes and neighborhoods, on the ballfields, in houses of worship, and yes schools. We practice these skills to get along well with each other and to thrive in our communities, cities, states, and nation. Having the ability to make informed decisions that help us get along with others in our everyday lives is the unique privilege of a democratic society. The current Ohio learning standards include not only history, government, geography, and financial literacy at each grade level; they also include developmentally appropriate skills standards that, if taught well, ensure we Ohio citizens leave high school with the content knowledge and skills sets to be informed and active citizens.

The proposed *American Birthright* curriculum recommends the complete removal of all skills, especially those related to critical thinking: "*American Birthright* includes no concepts or skills... Teachers should not waste precious classroom hours on mandated skills instruction" p.

20. The assumption here is that teaching skills is all Ohio social studies teachers do, and that could not be further from the truth. While the skills described in the Ohio Learning Standards (OLS) for Social Studies (ex., critical reading, analyzing a primary source, sourcing and contextualization of documents and media, providing evidentiary warrants to build and refute arguments, and leveraging collaboration and communication skills to solve programs) are essential to the future success of our democracy, they are in no way sufficient, and teachers know that. Ninety percent of the OLS standards are rich content standards that teachers use **ALONG WITH** the few essential skills standards.

The authors of the *American Birthright* curriculum have assumed that skills dominate social studies teaching in Ohio, and that in addition, associated active pedagogies have created “a new tribalism of identity politics.” They are critiquing sturdy, research-based approaches such as “service-learning, alternately called action civics, civic engagement, civic learning, community engagement, project-based civics, and global civics.” The misconception here is that active learning is all that we do. In reality what we work to accomplish is to send our students out into the world with a skill set that teaches them to make **INFORMED** decisions about the past so that they may learn how not to repeat. Being informed means learning facts, dates, key people, and events right along with skills of inquiry. We do this through all manner of pedagogies that teach both skills and content, resulting in informed and active citizens.

The current standards, which have been vetted by Ohio social studies educators, professors, and community members, include the necessary skills **AND** rich content to set Ohioans up for a successful future—historical thinking, spatial thinking, civic participation and engagement, economic decision-making, and financial literacy are all broad categories of skills woven throughout the current standards. It is the presence of these skills in combination with developmentally-appropriate social studies content that have led to American History and American Government consistently having the highest end-of-course test scores over any other content area.

The last thing I will say is that I spent a semester not too long ago talking to high school students about what advice they had for their teachers and administrators. Their most common concerns were for how hard their teachers worked, and also that they wished that they had more time in classrooms for important discussions that included problem-solving real life issues. The lessons they remembered most were those that required application of knowledge and went beyond the textbook.

This bill cheats students of a quality education and instead promotes an incomplete, inadequate, reductive education that shuns intellectual curiosity and closes minds rather than expanding

them. At the end of the day, HB 103 will leave our students ill-equipped to thrive as civically engaged, democratic citizens of our globally connected world.