Reviving the American Civic Tradition in

West Virginia

"What greater gift can we offer the republic than to teach and instruct our youth?"

- Cicero

Tiffany Hoben

Director of Education Partnerships & Strategy

With over 20 years of experience in education as a public school teacher, state-level director, and key figure at the Florida Department of Education, she played a pivotal role in implementing the governor's reforms for history, civics, and government instruction in Florida.

A passionate advocate for school choice, Tiffany is deeply committed to empowering parents as the ultimate authority over their children's education. Having recently moved to West Virginia with her family, she now home-educates her son while working daily to expand educational options for families across the state.

Her work emphasizes preserving the foundations of the constitutional republic through education and ensuring that all students — whether in public, private, or home schools — receive a robust civics education. Through her leadership, the Cardinal Institute strives to create a model school choice environment that can inspire and guide other states.

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Introduction:

Reviving the American Civic Tradition in West Virginia

The future of the American republic depends on the education of its citizens. The Founders understood that liberty is not self-sustaining: it must be preserved by people who understand how their government works, believe in the principles that undergird it, and possess the character to carry those principles forward. In West Virginia, however, the current K–12 social studies standards fall far short of this goal. Fragmented, ahistorical, and ideologically muddled, the standards do not provide students with a clear understanding of American government, its philosophical roots, or their role as stewards of a constitutional republic.

This is not a new concern. In 1788, Noah Webster, whose speller and dictionary helped forge American identity, wrote,

> **"But every child in America should be acquainted with his own country. He should read books that furnish him with ideas that will be useful to him in life and practice. As soon as he opens his lips, he should rehearse the history of his own country. He should lisp the praise of liberty and of those illustrious heroes and statesmen who have wrought a revolution in her favor."**

His words remind us that civic education is not simply about knowledge; it is about cultivating a sense of gratitude and duty toward the institutions and ideas that made our liberty possible.

In recent years, debates over the role of civics in the classroom have gained national attention, and West Virginia is no exception. While some reform has been attempted, the process has unfolded behind closed doors, without public accountability or the involvement of civic education experts. The result is a set of standards that not only fail to teach students how their government functions, but often emphasize political activism over civic knowledge, moral relativism over historical clarity, and global perspectives over national identity.

This paper argues for the formation of a Civics and Government Workgroup, authorized by either the Legislature or the Executive, to develop revised K–12 civics standards for West Virginia. This group should include civics education experts and practitioners, and should work transparently to create a coherent, content-rich, and philosophically grounded framework for civic education. Such a framework must emphasize the structure and function of American government, the importance of civic virtue, and the shared ideals that unite us as citizens. The workgroup's formation should be seen as a necessary correction, one that acknowledges the vital role of civic knowledge in preserving our self-governing society.

The Purpose of Civics in a Free Society

At its core, civic education is about preparing students for self-government. It is not just one subject among many, it is the very foundation of a free society. A strong civics curriculum helps students understand how their government functions, the responsibilities that accompany their rights, and the moral and philosophical underpinnings of the American experiment. It introduces them to the principles of justice, liberty, equality before the law, and limited government. When done well, a robust civics curriculum teaches students to think analytically, engage respectfully, and develop a deep sense of responsibility toward their neighbors and their nation.

Unfortunately, West Virginia's current social studies standards obscure these objectives. Instead of emphasizing shared ideals and national cohesion, they too often reflect the priorities of activist pedagogy, introducing students to civic tensions, protest movements, and social critiques before giving them the basic tools to understand the system they are meant to engage with. The result is a distorted version of civics, one that encourages discontent without comprehension and action without understanding.

Consider SS.US.1, the very first civics standard in West Virginia's high school United States History course. It reads: ***"Evaluate the extent to which the U.S.'s constitutional democracy impacts conflicts between individuals, communities and nations, liberty and equality, individual rights, and the rule of law versus ethics, (e.g., civil disobedience)."*** This standard, while ambitious, places far too much responsibility on students who may not yet have even read the Declaration of Independence or understood the structure of the federal government. It assumes they can evaluate complex civic tensions before they have a firm foundation in the ideals and systems within which those tensions operate.

Even more concerning is the repeated use of the term ***"constitutional democracy"*** throughout the standards. While the phrase is increasingly common in modern usage, it is imprecise and misleading. The United States is not a constitutional democracy; it is a constitutional republic. The difference matters. In a pure democracy, the majority rules directly. In a constitutional republic, the powers of government are limited by a written constitution, and the people exercise their sovereignty through elected representatives. This system was deliberately designed to prevent the tyranny of the majority and to protect individual rights, especially for those in the minority. Mischaracterizing our system from the outset only adds to the confusion for students and undermines their understanding of how American self-government actually works.

Moreover, the standard's example of "civil disobedience" again signals the curriculum's emphasis on critique and activism over foundational knowledge and civic unity. Rather than guiding students to understand what unites us as Americans, constitutional principles, shared institutions, and civic virtues, the standards often focus on what divides us, fostering an adversarial relationship with the very system they should be learning to preserve.

What civics education should teach, especially in a state with such strong patriotic traditions, is a shared understanding of American identity. This does not mean glossing over the nation's shortcomings; it means teaching students that the American system is designed to be self-correcting. It is a system that empowers individuals to act, not through protest alone, but through participation, deliberation, and the rule of law. Civics education should prepare students to be stewards of the republic, not merely critics of it.

When students are taught to recognize the genius of a system that allows for liberty, protects minority rights, and provides peaceful means of change, they are more likely to value it. When they are exposed to the stories of Americans who upheld those ideals, Frederick Douglass, George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, and Martin Luther King Jr., they see that patriotism is not blind allegiance, but informed commitment. In this way, civic virtue and patriotism are not outdated concepts; they are essential elements of preserving our constitutional republic.

The Foundations of American Government

A coherent civics education must begin with the philosophical foundations and historical origins of the American form of government. Without an understanding of the ideas that gave rise to the U.S. Constitution, and the centuries of English legal and political traditions that preceded it, students cannot grasp what makes the American republic unique, resilient, and worth preserving. These foundational ideas are not relics of the past; they are active principles that continue to shape the rights and responsibilities of American citizens today.

At the heart of the American experiment are a few core concepts: natural rights, the consent of the governed, the rule of law, limited government, federalism, and the separation of powers. These were not innovations created from scratch in 1787, but the culmination of a philosophical lineage that stretched back to ancient Greece and Rome, and more directly through the English tradition. The Magna Carta (1215), the English Petition of Right (1628), the English Bill of Rights (1689), and the English common law tradition planted the seeds of individual liberty and lawful governance. Thinkers such as John Locke further developed the notion that government's legitimacy derives from the consent of the people, and that the purpose of government is to secure the natural rights of life, liberty, and property.

These ideas influenced the American colonists as they shaped their own political identity in the 18th century. When Thomas Jefferson wrote the Declaration of Independence, he drew directly from Locke's political theory and echoed the sentiments of generations of English constitutional resistance. When the Framers met in Philadelphia to draft the Constitution, they carefully constructed a government that would check ambition with ambition, diffuse power, and protect liberty, not through idealism, but through structural safeguards. James Madison called these "auxiliary precautions" in Federalist 51.

Yet in West Virginia's current social studies standards, these philosophical origins are either minimized or entirely absent. The standards focus on downstream political developments without ever explaining their upstream intellectual roots. The foundational thinkers (Locke and Montesquieu) and the documents that illustrate these ideas, like the Magna Carta, the Mayflower Compact, or Common Sense, are either omitted or mentioned only in passing, without context or required analysis. In fact, the explicit teaching of these texts and ideas does not appear until the high school civics course, which students typically do not take until 11th or 12th grade. This lack of early and consistent exposure weakens students' ability to connect core democratic principles to the content they encounter in earlier grades.

For example, the fourth-grade standard SS.4.15 asks students to "trace the beginnings of America as a nation and the establishment of the new government," but omits any mention of the Constitutional Convention, the key compromises that made the Constitution possible, or the debate over ratification. Instead, it shifts prematurely to "political, social and economic challenges faced by the new nation," including "expansion of slavery" and "taxation," without first establishing the framework of self-government. These topics are certainly important, but presenting them without first equipping students with an understanding of the philosophical and structural foundations of the government distorts the picture.

Even the Northwest Ordinance, arguably the most important success of the Articles of Confederation and one of the clearest examples of how America began to address the question of slavery, is not mentioned. This omission represents a broader trend: standards emphasize modern tensions without offering the historical reasoning or structural design that might help students understand how Americans once addressed those same tensions thoughtfully and through the constitutional process.

Middle school standards similarly neglect the transmission of foundational ideas. In seventh grade, the curriculum is framed as a "continent-based study," but it has been stripped of nearly all European content, including the Magna Carta and English Bill of Rights. These critical building blocks of Anglo-American political thought have been deleted entirely. Instead of helping students see how these ideas evolved and came to animate American institutions, the standards emphasize disconnected geographic and cultural units that dilute the central story of American constitutional development.

An effective civics education cannot begin in the middle. If we want students to care about the American system of government, we must first teach them where it came from, why it was created, and what makes it different from the regimes that preceded it. Only then can they appreciate the structure of the Constitution, the balance it strikes between liberty and order, and the profound importance of the rule of law.

The Purpose of Civics in a Free Society

A high-quality civics education must be structured, intentional, and developmentally appropriate. Concepts like liberty, justice, rule of law, and representative government cannot be taught as isolated facts or dropped into disconnected grade-level units. They require repetition, reinforcement, and increasing complexity over time, a model known in curriculum design as spiraling. In a spiraled civics curriculum, students are introduced to key concepts early and revisit them at deeper levels as they mature cognitively and academically. Unfortunately, West Virginia's social studies standards show no evidence of this kind of coherent design. Instead, they are disjointed, uneven in rigor, and often assign complex tasks without the necessary prior knowledge or foundational instruction.

One glaring example comes in the elementary grades. In second grade, students are asked to "actively discuss the characteristics of effective leadership" (SS.2.2). At this age, however, they have not yet been taught about a single historical leader, nor have they been introduced to the structure or function of government at any level. Without context, what exactly is a second grader supposed to contribute to a discussion about "effective leadership"? This is not civics, it is vague behavioral theorizing detached from civic content.

This problem continues into upper elementary grades. In fourth grade, for example, students are asked to examine how slavery and indentured servitude influenced the economy of the early United States by creating charts and graphs (SS.4.7). But there is no accompanying requirement that they understand the historical, moral, legal, or constitutional context of slavery. Students are asked to study slavery not as a human tragedy or as a fundamental challenge to American ideals, but as a fourth-grade economics project. In fifth grade, students are introduced to the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments (SS.5.6) before they have even studied the Bill of Rights in any required way. These amendments, passed in the wake of a bloody civil war and a century of legal oppression, are presented without reference to the constitutional debates that preceded them. There is no foundation on which to build meaningful understanding.

This lack of academic sequencing creates a deeper issue: verbs are misused as proxies for rigor. Across the standards, students are repeatedly asked to "analyze," "evaluate," "debate," and "critique" ideas or institutions they have barely encountered. In place of a clear scope and sequence, the standards substitute complexity of language, as though difficult verbs can compensate for missing content. But students cannot analyze what they have not learned. They cannot critique what they do not understand. And when these verbs are misapplied, they unintentionally train students to approach civic life with cynicism before they have developed comprehension.

Moreover, the standards fail to clearly outline what students should be able to do as a result of their civic education. There are no grade-level benchmarks that build toward a culminating understanding of American government by graduation. Instead, each year operates independently, with inconsistent expectations and scattered content. Students might encounter the Constitution in fifth grade, again in eighth grade, and again in eleventh grade, but in different contexts, with different framing, and often without reinforcement of the same core ideas.

In short, the curriculum lacks what educational scholars call "vertical alignment." There is no throughline that connects early exposure to American symbols, documents, and ideas with later analysis of historical developments and modern civic responsibilities. As a result, students are left with fragmented knowledge, if they receive any meaningful instruction at all.

A proper civics curriculum would begin in the early grades with recognition of national symbols, holidays, and foundational figures. By upper elementary, students should be familiar with basic government structures and the principles behind the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution. Middle school should provide context through historical case studies, key Supreme Court decisions, and exposure to the global and philosophical origins of American institutions. High school should culminate in a focused, document-rich study of American government, rights, responsibilities, and the civic virtues necessary to sustain a free society.

Without spiraling and coherence, civic education collapses into a series of shallow exercises and disconnected ideas. West Virginia's students deserve better. They deserve a civic education designed with the same level of care and intention as we apply to math and literacy. Anything less is a disservice, not only to them but to the republic they will one day be asked to preserve.

Action Before Knowledge

A major flaw in West Virginia's current social studies standards is the premature emphasis on activism, protest, and contemporary social issues, often bundled under the labels of "Action Civics" and "Social Justice." These frameworks draw upon the radical National Council for the Social Studies' definitions of social studies and civics, and upon its College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards (C3 Framework). They therefore encourage students to engage with civic life emotionally and experientially, rather than intellectually and structurally. While participation and engagement are worthy goals, they must follow a clear understanding of the civic system itself. In the current standards, that sequence is reversed. Students are being asked to "take action" before they've been taught what the Constitution says, how laws are made, or what their own civic duties actually entail.

Action Civics promotes student-led projects, service learning, and simulations of civic participation as the primary mode of civic learning. This philosophy becomes especially clear in fifth grade, where the second civics standard asks students to "assume a role in a mock proceeding," followed immediately by a standard requiring them to "simulate the process of making a law." These activities might appear to promote civic engagement, but they are fundamentally unmoored from content. At no point in the K–5 sequence are students explicitly taught how the judicial system works or what the actual steps are in the lawmaking process. They are expected to act out government functions they have never formally studied. This approach places performance ahead of comprehension and reduces civics to a set of empty rituals rather than meaningful understanding.

Even more concerning is the way social justice themes are embedded in the standards without being clearly defined or historically grounded. For example, the third-grade standard SS.3.1 lists "diversity" as a "commonly held American democratic value," alongside actual founding principles like the rule of law, justice, and ordered liberty. While diversity is certainly part of American life, it is not, in itself, a constitutional or democratic value, at least not in the way that due process, equal protection, and consent of the governed are. This kind of revisionist framing muddies the waters between core civic principles and modern ideological preferences.

As noted, the standards also encourage students to form opinions and take positions before they have encountered sufficient background knowledge. In fourth grade, slavery is presented primarily as an economic factor (SS.4.7), asking students to "construct graphics" showing its influence on early American markets. This treatment reduces slavery to a data point rather than a moral, legal, and constitutional crisis that tested the republic's ideals. In fifth-grade history, students are introduced to the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments (SS.5.6) with no prior instruction on the U.S. Constitution or the Bill of Rights. These amendments, critical to understanding America's struggle to extend liberty, are offered in a vacuum.

This rushed approach leads to a dangerous combination: students are trained to "analyze," "debate," and "critique" without context or content. It primes them for confrontation rather than comprehension. The result is a shallow kind of civic engagement, rooted more in activism than informed patriotism. Students begin to see protest as the central mode of civic life, rather than deliberation, voting, petitioning, serving on juries, or participating in local government.

A civics education focused on analytical thinking and civil discourse is not afraid to examine America's flaws. But it also presents a full and honest picture of the republic's design and development. It introduces the tools of change and reform embedded in the U.S. Constitution itself. It does not lead with activism; rather, it equips students to judge whether and when action is appropriate, and how it might be taken within a system that values order, consent, and liberty.

What Students Should Know - and Be Able to Do

Civics education is not about memorizing facts for a test, nor is it about encouraging political performance. It is about forming knowledgeable, responsible citizens who understand their rights, respect the limits of government, and feel a sense of duty to preserve and strengthen the republic. Yet, nowhere in West Virginia's current social studies standards is there a clear vision for what a well-educated civics student should know and be able to do by the time they graduate.

If West Virginia wants to prepare students to become active, informed citizens, then the curriculum must prioritize clarity, competence, and constitutional understanding. That starts with setting firm expectations for what students should master, not just what they should explore. And it means treating civics as more than a collection of projects or social commentary. It must be a cumulative, content-rich study of how American self-government works and why it matters.

At a minimum, West Virginia students should graduate with a deep and working knowledge of:

The structure and function of American government, including the three branches, separation of powers, checks and balances, and federalism

The founding documents of the United States, particularly the Declaration of Independence, the U.S. Constitution, the Bill of Rights, and key amendments

The moral and political philosophy that shaped the republic, including concepts like liberty, natural rights, consent of the governed, and rule of law

The history and consequences of pivotal debates, including those at the Constitutional Convention and in the Federalist and Anti-Federalist Papers

The role of civil discourse in a healthy democracy, how to reason through disagreement without descending into hostility or performance

The meaning and responsibilities of citizenship in a free society, including voting, civic participation, and respect for legal processes

These are not optional goals; they are the bare minimum for a civically competent adult. Yet the current standards do little to build toward them. In elementary school, there is no explicit requirement that students read or discuss primary sources like the Declaration or Constitution. In middle school, students encounter vague global themes and broad historical trends, with little focus on the unique design and character of the U.S. system. Even in high school, standards refer to core documents only indirectly, often using "e.g." language that suggests, rather than requires, engagement with foundational texts.

Civic discourse, a hallmark of republican governance, is also largely absent. Students are not taught how to listen carefully, make evidence-based arguments, or respond charitably to opposing views. They are not asked to study the Federalist–Anti-Federalist debates, the Webster–Hayne debates, or the Lincoln–Douglas debates, all powerful examples of how reasoned disagreement helped shape the nation. Instead, the curriculum tends to reduce discourse to group activities or "discussion," without a clear model of how real civic dialogue has shaped American political life.

Perhaps most concerning is the failure to immerse students in primary source material. There is little to no required reading of foundational documents in grades K–8. Even in high school, documents like the ***Federalist Papers, Common Sense,*** or the Magna Carta are not explicitly listed as required components of the curriculum. These documents are not just historical artifacts, they are civic tools. They allow students to encounter arguments as they were originally made, to understand how American ideals were formed and defended, and to practice reasoning through big ideas for themselves.

Instead of working toward these essential outcomes, the standards often fixate on performance-based tasks like simulations and mock trials. These may have a place ***after*** knowledge is acquired, but when used as a substitute for real content, they cheapen the learning process and leave students ill-prepared for civic life.

West Virginia has a rare opportunity to be bold in reshaping civic education, not to meet a political trend, but to restore the original purpose of civics: to raise up men and women capable of sustaining liberty. The goal is not to produce citizens who merely feel strongly, it is to cultivate citizens who ***understand deeply.*** That requires a curriculum built on what matters most: enduring principles, foundational texts, structured knowledge, and a vision of citizenship grounded in reason, responsibility, and gratitude.

If West Virginia is to correct the deficiencies in its current civics standards, it must adopt a model that offers both structure and substance. Fortunately, such a model already exists. The National Association of Scholars (NAS), through its Civics Alliance, has developed ***American Birthright,*** a comprehensive set of K–12 social studies standards designed to restore civic literacy, historical coherence, and intellectual honesty to public education.

What sets ***American Birthright*** apart is its clarity of purpose. It does not attempt to wrap civics in activism or dilute history in identity politics. Instead, it focuses on providing students with a strong foundation in the disciplines of history, geography, civics, and economics, emphasizing the values and principles that define Western Civilization and the American political tradition. The standards are structured, content-rich, and spiral intentionally across grade levels. Each concept builds upon previous instruction, allowing students to revisit key ideas at increasing levels of complexity.

Unlike West Virginia's current standards, ***American Birthright*** explicitly integrates primary source documents into the curriculum, not as optional examples but as central texts. From the Magna Carta, Declaration of Independence, and U.S. Constitution, to writings like ***Common Sense,*** the ***Federalist Papers,*** and the Gettysburg Address, students are required to engage with the documents that shaped, and continue to shape, our constitutional republic. This approach ensures that students do not simply hear about American ideals in summary form but encounter those ideals in the words of the men and women who debated, defined, and defended them.

American Birthright also rejects the pedagogical trend of privileging political action over academic knowledge. Its standards encourage civic participation, but only after grounding students in the structure, function, and philosophical roots of the system they are being asked to preserve or improve. It strikes the right balance: civic knowledge comes first, followed by civic understanding, and then, if appropriate, civic participation.

Several states, including Oklahoma, South Dakota, and Virginia, have already used ***American Birthright*** as a foundation for reviewing and improving their own standards. These efforts were driven by governors and legislatures who recognized that education should serve the republic, not undermine it. West Virginia should do the same.

But adopting a sound model is not enough. A successful revision of civics and government standards will require the formation of a formal working group, empowered to operate independently of the West Virginia Department of Education and composed of experts in civic education, constitutional government, political philosophy, and classroom instruction. This group should be appointed with input from the legislature and the governor's office and should be charged with producing new, public-facing standards that align with the values and institutional knowledge necessary for sustaining a free society.

West Virginia's Department of Education produced the existing, insufficient standards. West Virginians should not delegate the revision of these standards to the same people who produced standards according to a fundamentally misguided model. Members of the West Virginia Department of Education, moreover, may be expected to follow the radical structure imposed by the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) and by like-minded organizations such as the American Institutes for Research (AIR). West Virginians realistically must expect that the Department of Education will reform West Virginia's social studies standards at best half-heartedly. West Virginians should make sure that their standards are drafted independently by civics education experts who will make a clean break from the NCSS and the AIR, and who believe in and know how to accomplish thoroughgoing reform of civics standards.

The current approach, driven by bureaucrats operating behind closed doors, has resulted in a politicized and incoherent framework. West Virginia must break from this pattern by creating a transparent, expert-led process that centers on what is best for students and for the state. The *American Birthright* framework provides a template for doing just that.

The Case for Comprehensive Social Studies Reform

West Virginia stands at a pivotal moment. The state has an opportunity to lead the nation in restoring meaningful, principled, and knowledge-rich civic education, but only if it acknowledges that the current social studies standards are fundamentally broken. What exists today is not a coherent framework, but a disjointed patchwork of content that separates history, civics, and government into isolated silos. It asks students to perform civic engagement without understanding its roots, to critique their country without having studied its founding, and to participate in democratic processes they've never been systematically taught.

This is not how you build a generation of informed, responsible, and patriotic citizens.

What West Virginia needs is not a revision of its civics standards alone. It needs a complete rewrite of the K–12 social studies standards, from elementary through high school, to create a unified and spiraled structure that connects U.S. History, Civics, and Government into a coherent civic education strand. These subjects should no longer be taught in isolation, with U.S. History presented without political philosophy, and civics without historical context. Instead, students should encounter American principles, events, and institutions as interdependent threads in one civic story, a story of ordered liberty, self-government, and the continual striving to live up to founding ideals.

West Virginia students also should know about the terrible history of Communism and the fundamental differences between America's ideals and Communist ones. West Virginia social standards should be informed by Oklahoma's History of Totalitarianism standards, Florida's forthcoming History of Communism Standards, and the Civics Alliance's model History of Communism standards.

This transformation must begin with the creation of a Civics and Government Working Group, appointed by legislative or executive authority and composed of content experts, classroom educators, civic scholars, and public policy professionals. That group must be empowered not just to review existing civics standards, but to lead a full-scale overhaul of the social studies sequence itself. The result should be a content-rich, vertically aligned, and historically grounded curriculum that introduces students to America's founding documents, core institutions, philosophical roots, and defining conflicts, early, often, and in increasing depth. The new content-rich structure will facilitate statewide and local assessments by providing test designers more concrete facts to use in their assessments. It also will provide assistance to new teachers who seek guidance as they prepare themselves to teach civics and social studies courses.

The stakes could not be higher. If our students graduate without understanding the structure, function, and limits of their government, they will not be equipped to preserve it. If they have never read the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, or the Bill of Rights, they will not recognize when those principles are under threat. They will be at the mercy of louder voices and shallower ideas if they do not know what the Founders believed, what the Constitution protects, or how liberty survives.

As Alexis de Tocqueville wrote,

"Nothing is more wonderful than the art of being free, but nothing is harder to learn how to use than freedom."

Our students deserve a civic education that teaches them to understand, value, and responsibly use that freedom, not just for themselves, but for the republic they will one day inherit.

Appendix:

A Comparative Look at High School Civics Standards

Both West Virginia and Florida include civics instruction across all grade levels. However, this appendix focuses on a direct, side-by-side comparison of each state's high school civics standards to allow for a more accurate and meaningful evaluation. High school is the stage at which civics education is most explicitly defined, and thus it provides the clearest window into each state's vision for preparing students to understand and sustain our constitutional republic.

The goal of this comparison is not simply to suggest that one course be rewritten. That would be a serious mistake. The deficiencies revealed here are not isolated to a single grade or class, they are emblematic of deeper issues that persist throughout West Virginia's entire K–12 social studies curriculum. As shown throughout this report, the state's standards lack coherence, foundational content, and developmental sequencing. These problems cannot be addressed by piecemeal revision; they require a comprehensive overhaul grounded in civic purpose, philosophical clarity, and historical integrity.

It is helpful to understand the Florida standard's tiered design as it provides clarity and consistency across all grade levels, making it easier for educators to plan instruction and for students to know what they are expected to learn. West Virginia has no such design.

> **Florida has a unique coding scheme defined by 5-character places in an alphanumeric coding: the subject, grade level, strand, standard and benchmark. For kindergarten through grade 8, the coding scheme is defined by each individual grade level. For grades 9-12, the scheme is banded and organized by strands. The strand is a focal group of related standards. Standards are overarching criteria for the grade level or grade band. The benchmark is a specific expectation for the grade level or grade band that falls within the standard. The social studies content within the benchmarks is to be learned during the year and mastered by the end of the year.**

Benchmarks are further detailed with clarifications. Clarifications provide additional explanation, context, or examples to guide instruction and ensure consistent understanding of what the benchmark requires. For instance, a clarification might specify that students should explain the purpose of government in terms of protection of rights, organization, security, and services.

In other words:

01

Standards set the broad learning goals.

02

Benchmarks define specific, measurable learning outcomes within each standard.

03

Clarifications ensure teachers and students understand exactly what is expected, often by providing examples or further definitions.

What follows is a line-by-line comparison between select West Virginia and Florida standards, alongside the language from West Virginia state code that outlines required civic content.

West Virginia State Code, §18-2-9. Required courses of instruction

> **...The required courses shall include instruction on the institutions and structure of American government, such as the separation of powers, the Electoral College, and federalism. The required courses shall include instruction that provides students an understanding of American political philosophy and history, utilizing writings from prominent figures in Western civilization, such as Aristotle, Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and Thomas Jefferson. The courses of instruction shall offer an objective and critical analysis of ideologies throughout history including, but not limited to, capitalism, republicanism, democracy, socialism, communism, and fascism...**

	WV Civics Course Standard 11th or 12th Grade	FL Standards (9th –12th Grade)
The First Benchmark sets the Tone...	***SS.C.1*** Be aware of the importance of informed citizens who actively participate in the preservation and improvement of American government through community service and service-learning (e.g., individual service projects, patriotic events, mock trials, group initiatives, community volunteerism).	***SS.912.CG.1.1*** Examine how intellectual influences in primary documents contributed to the ideas in the Declaration of Independence, the U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights. **Clarification 1:** Students will recognize the influence of the Judeo-Christian tradition, republicanism, the English Constitution and common Law, and the European Enlightenment in establishing the organic laws of the United States in primary documents (e.g., Magna Carta (1215); the Mayflower Compact (1620); the English Bill of Rights (1689); Common Sense (1776); Declaration of Independence (1776); the Constitution of Massachusetts (1780); the Articles of Confederation (1781); the Northwest Ordinance (1787); U.S. Constitution (1789)).
Principles of the Constitution	***SS.C.7*** Evaluate the elements in the US. Constitution that make it a living document with democratic principles that are modified and expanded to meet the changing needs of society.	***SS.912.CG.1.5*** Explain how the U.S. Constitution and its amendments uphold the following political principles: checks and balances, consent of the governed, democracy, due process of law, federalism, individual rights, limited government, representative government, republicanism, rule of law and separation of powers. **Clarification 1:** Students will explain how the structure and function of the U.S. government reflects these political principles. **Clarification 2:** Students will differentiate between republicanism and democracy, and discuss how the United States reflects both. **Clarification 3:** Students will describe compromises made during the Constitutional Convention (e.g., the Great Compromise, the Three-Fifths Compromise, the Electoral College).

	WV Civics Course Standard 11th or 12th Grade	FL Standards (9th –12th Grade)
Articles of the Constitution	***SS.C.9*** Analyze how the U.S. Constitution defines federalism and outlines a structure for the United States government.	***SS.912.CG.3.3*** Analyze the structures, functions and processes of the legislative branch as described in Article I of the U.S. Constitution. **Clarification 1:** Students will explain why Article I of the U.S. Constitution established a bicameral legislative body and how the House of Representatives functions differently from the Senate. **Clarification 2:** Students will identify the methods for determining the number of members in the House of Representatives and the Senate. **Clarification 3:** Students will identify and describe the "enumerated powers" delegated to Congress (e.g., assess taxes, borrow money, declare war, make laws). **Clarification 4:** Students will analyze the role of the legislative branch in terms of its relationship with the judicial and executive branch of the government. **Clarification 5:** Students will describe constitutional amendments that changed the role of Congress from its original description in Article I of the U.S. Constitution (i.e., 10th, 14th, 16th, 17th and 27th Amendments). ***SS.912.CG.3.4*** Analyze the structures, functions and processes of the executive branch as described in Article II of the U.S. Constitution. **Clarification 1:** Students will explain the qualifications one must have to seek the office of president and the process of presidential elections. **Clarification 2:** Students will explain different presidential responsibilities outlined in Article II (e.g., receiving foreign heads of state, delivering the State of the Union address, carrying out faithful execution of the law). **Clarification 3:** Students will examine the role of the executive branch in terms of its relationship with the judicial and legislative branches of the government. **Clarification 4:** Students will describe constitutional amendments (i.e., 12th, 20th, 22nd and 25th) that have changed the role of the executive branch from its original description in Article II. **Clarification 5:** Students will describe the impeachment process.

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		SS.912.CG.3.7 Analyze the structures, functions and processes of the judicial branch as described in Article III of the U.S. Constitution. **Clarification 1:** Students will examine the role of the judicial branch in terms of its relationship with the legislative and executive branches of the government. **Clarification 2:** Students will describe the role of the Supreme Court and lesser federal courts. **Clarification 3:** Students will explain what Articles II and III says about judicial tenure, appointment and salaries. **Clarification 4:** Students will describe the powers delegated to the courts by Article III including, but not limited to, treason, jurisdiction and trial by jury.
Expansion of Rights	***SS.C.10*** Analyze the protection of liberties in the Bil of Rights and their expansion through judicial review and the gradual incorporation of those rights by the Fourteenth Amendment.	***SS.912.CG.2.6*** Explain how the principles contained in foundational documents contributed to the expansion of civil rights and liberties over time. **Clarification 1:** Students will explain how different groups of people (e.g., African Americans, immigrants, Native Americans, women) had their civil rights expanded through legislative action (e.g., Voting Rights Act, Civil Rights Act), executive action (e.g., Truman's desegregation of the army, Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation) and the courts (e.g., Brown v. Board of Education; In re Gault). **Clarification 2:** Students will explain the role founding documents, such as the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, had on setting precedent for the future granting of rights.

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Landmark Supreme Court Cases	***SS.C.14*** Apply the concepts of legal precedent through past and present landmark Supreme Court cases, interpretations of the U.S. Constitution by the Supreme Court and the impact of these decisions on American society.	***SS.912.CG.3.11*** Evaluate how landmark Supreme Court decisions affect law, liberty and the interpretation of the U.S. Constitution. **Clarifications** **Clarification 1:** Students will recognize landmark Supreme Court cases (e.g., Marbury v. Madison; McCulloch v. Maryland; Dred Scott v. Sandford; Plessy v. Ferguson; Brown v. Board of Education; Gideon v. Wainwright; Miranda v. Arizona; Korematsu v. United States; Mapp v. Ohio; In re Gault; United States v. Nixon; Hazelwood v. Kuhlmeier; District of Columbia v. Heller; Schenck v. United States; Brandenburg v. Ohio; Students for Fair Admissions, Inc. v. President and Fellows of Harvard College). **Clarification 2:** Students will explain the foundational constitutional issues underlying landmark Supreme Court decisions related to the Bill of Rights and other amendments. **Clarification 3:** Students will explain the outcomes of landmark Supreme Court cases related to the Bill of Rights and other amendments.
Political Parties	***SS.C.16*** Critique the evolution of the two-party system in the United States, evaluate how society and political parties have changed over time and analyze how political parties function today.	***SS.912.CG.2.8*** Explain the impact of political parties, interest groups, media and individuals on determining and shaping public policy. **Clarification 1:** Students will explain the origins of the Republican and Democratic political parties and evaluate their roles in shaping public policy. **Clarification 2:** Students will identify historical examples of interest groups, media and individuals influencing public policy. **Clarification 3:** Students will compare and contrast how the free press influenced politics at major points in U.S. history (e.g., Vietnam War Era, Civil Rights Era).

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The Media	***SS.C.17*** Assess the influence of the media on public opinion and on the decisions of elected officials and the bureaucracy • Bias in reporting and editorials. • Push-pull polls and selective reporting of citizen opinions. Advertising and campaign ads: • Reporting news out of context.	***SS.912.CG.2.11*** Evaluate political communication for bias, factual accuracy, omission and emotional appeal. **Clarification 1:** Students will compare the reporting on the same political event or issue from multiple perspectives. **Clarification 2:** Students will identify various forms of propaganda (e.g., plain folks, glittering generalities, testimonial, fear, logical fallacies). **Clarification 3:** Students will discuss the historical impact of political communication on American political process and public opinion. **Clarification 4:** Examples of political communication may include, but are not limited to, political cartoons, propaganda, campaign advertisements, political speeches, bumper stickers, blogs, press and social media. ***SS.912.CG.2.12*** Explain how interest groups, the media and public opinion influence local, state and national decision-making related to public issues. **Clarification 1:** Students will objectively discuss current public issues in Florida and use both the U.S. and Florida Constitutions to justify pro and con positions. **Clarification 2:** Students will examine the relationship and responsibilities of both the state and national governments regarding these public issues. **Clarification 3:** Students will analyze public policy solutions related to local, state and national issues. ***SS.912.CG.2.13*** Analyze the influence and effects of various forms of media and the internet in political communication. **Clarification 1:** Students will explain how the methods of political communication has changed over time (e.g., television, radio, press, social media). **Clarification 2:** Students will describe how the methods used by political officials to communicate with the public has changed over time. **Clarification 3:** Students will discuss the strengths and weaknesses of different methods of political communication.

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Communism	***SS.C.22*** Compare and contrast the values, ideals, and principles that are the foundation of a democratic republic and the role citizens play in a constitutional democracy, to the theories and practices of non-democratic governments (e.g, socialism found in communism and nationalism found in fascism).	***SS.912.CG.4.1*** Analyze how liberty and economic freedom generate broad-based opportunity and prosperity in the United States. **Clarification 1:** Students will differentiate between government systems (e.g., autocracy, democracy, monarchy, oligarchy republic, theocracy). **Clarification 2:** Students will differentiate between economic systems (e.g., capitalism, communism, mixed market, socialism). **Clarification 3:** Students will analyze the disadvantages of authoritarian control over the economy (e.g., communism and socialism) in generating broad-based economic prosperity for their population.