



Reframing the Teaching and Learning of Migration/Immigration in U.S. History

Authors:

Caitlin Haynes

Tyler Stump



Executive Summary

Introduction

The research and writing of “Reframing the Teaching and Learning of Migration/Immigration in U.S. History,” a report on the social studies standards of all fifty states and the District of Columbia, led to a number of significant conclusions about the teaching of immigration and migration in public schools. These findings revealed how states, districts, and individual schools teach the subject; the content found in curriculums; and additional resources made available to educators to supplement state standards documents. The conclusions detailed below are highlighted because they demonstrate nationwide trends, illustrate the incorporation of new and different techniques for teaching the history of U.S. immigration and migration, or are relevant to current trends in immigration/migration scholarship and pedagogy.

Inclusion of Migration/Immigration History in State Social Studies Standards

To varying degrees, social studies standards for every state examine the history and impact of immigration/migration in the United States. A majority of state standards mention colonial immigration, the impact of immigration and migration on Native Americans, nineteenth-century westward expansion, early twentieth century immigration from Europe, and contemporary immigration/migration since 1965. Most state standards discuss immigration/migration in at least nine different grade levels, and the subject is usually taught from interdisciplinary perspectives including history, geography, civics/politics, and economics. In addition, a majority of state standards encourage students to think critically about immigration and migration from political, social, and cultural angles. Most stand standards feature general concepts regarding the causes and consequences (both positive and negative) of the movement of people across borders and regions. Communication with social studies coordinators across the nation confirmed that, at the state level, the teaching of immigration/migration is a priority in social studies education.

Local versus National History

In an effort to teach and promote state/local history, many states emphasize historical immigration/migration at the state and local level in their respective standards. Some standards compare local patterns of movement and migration to larger national trends, but many more do not. For example, some midwestern and West Coast states do not discuss any historical immigration/migration in the United States until the era of westward expansion in the nineteenth century. Few states include detailed discussion of contemporary immigration to the United States.

Many states that situate immigration/migration in a local context often fail to include recent developments in their local migration history. Many states with significant Latina/o populations

or have seen significant increases in their immigration population in recent decades do not have many (or any) standards that discuss modern-day Latina/o immigration. In these cases, the experiences of contemporary local migration trends are not connected to historical learning.

Nearly every state offers courses in state/regional history; when these courses refer to immigration or migration, they employ local examples to illustrate the individual migrant experience and its diversity in the United States. For instance, Washington state asks third-grade students to examine the contributions of Hispanic workers in the Yakima Valley, Asian immigrants in Bainbridge's strawberry industry, and the technology and art employed by local Native American tribes. Together, these local examples are used to teach students how different cultural groups have shaped the history of the community and the world. In New York, fourth-grade students research an immigrant group in their local community as a part of a larger unit on immigration from the nineteenth century to the present day.

Complex Narratives of Immigration

The history of immigration and migration in the United States is incredibly diverse and complicated, involving migrations to, around, and from the U.S. by a variety of groups and individuals with many different motivations and experiences. Many state standards, however, do not seem to explore complex narratives of immigration and migration. Migrations are often characterized as a "one-way trip" to the United States or from one location in the U.S. to another. Few references in any state's standards discuss the return migrations of early twentieth century laborers, migrants who moved around frequently to find employment, the movement of slaves from one owner to another, or the many other histories that reveal the fluidity of migration in and around the nation.

State standards often use the blanket term "immigrants" to refer to all migrants without any references to age, gender, race/ethnicity, or other factors that shape the experience of immigration and the construction of identity in American history. From the standards alone, it seems that each historical wave of immigrants and migrants all had the same experiences and faced the same obstacles. Differences between immigrant experiences are most often identified along racial or ethnic lines. For example, when colonial-era migrants are discussed, the different European countries of origin of colonists are sometimes included. Similarly, standards sometimes mention the different countries of origin of early twentieth century migrants. Native Americans and African American slaves are usually identified as groups that experienced forced migrations. Gender, on the other hand, is rarely mentioned in any state's standards, nor is age considered a factor that affected migrants' particular experiences.

North Carolina stands out as a state that includes diverse groups of migrants and connects these differences to varied migrant experiences. North Carolina's standards expect students to know "how and to what extent the gold rush benefited or harmed groups moving to western mining camps (e.g., American 49ers, Hispanics, Chinese, American Indians and women)." Another rare reference to gender can be found in the New Jersey standards, which ask students to "relate varying immigrants' experiences to gender, race, ethnicity, or occupation." California's social studies standards and its History-Social Science Framework (a supplementary document) also

emphasize diversity within the immigrant experience and cite particular examples of immigrant groups. For instance, within the Framework, fifth grade U.S. history stresses an understanding of many different immigrant groups involved in early colonial settlement (such as the English, Scots-Irish, Irish, and Germans) and westward expansion (such as Mexicans, Russians, Chileans, Chinese, Japanese, Koreans, Filipinos, and Indians). While standards rarely include such specificity, model curriculum units and other supplemental resources routinely expose the diversity of migrant groups by mentioning experiences that differ according to countries of origin, occupations, genders, ages, races, and ethnicities. It is unclear, however, how often or in what ways teachers implement these supplemental resources. The lack of diverse or complex narratives of immigration/migration in the state standards indicates that this is an area that might serve as a focus of critical evaluation.

The Incorporation of Migration/Immigration into Other Narratives

Most state standards are divided into subject area strands (geography, economics, history, and civics and government) and major themes that guide grade level content. Immigration and migration related concepts most often appear within geography and history strands, with occasional references within civics and economics. Of particular note, however, are state standards that incorporate unique content strands and themes examining the history of immigration and migration. For example, Kansas and Mississippi feature social studies content strands and units on civil rights, human rights, and social justice, encouraging students to think critically about immigration and migration as an aspect of these larger, historical issues. Hawaii and Alaska emphasize cultural standards that emphasize the specific cultural traditions and dynamic systems within each state. These strands include broad concepts related to immigration and migration and encourage students to think critically about cultural interaction and exchange. Content in Maine's and Connecticut's standards are also governed by subject strands and themes, but educators are encouraged to choose particular themes either to guide all content or to serve as a focus for specific courses. Maine's standards document—although brief in overall historical content—offers four themes to guide curriculum development. One of these themes focuses on conflict and cooperation and migration and immigration; another emphasizes the interactions of people, cultures, and ideas. Connecticut's standards are much more thorough, and include multiple themes regarding immigration and migration. One major theme, Cultural Diversity and American National Identity, encourages critical examinations of the factors that contributed to cultural diversity in the U.S. Students are asked to explore the movement and settlement patterns of people who immigrated to the U.S. or migrated within the country; and to analyze gender roles in economic, political, and social life, including the role of women and men in early colonial settlement and westward expansion. Connecticut's standards also encourage teachers to employ the Struggle for Freedom, Equality, and Social Justice theme as a focus of high school history; the standards emphasize that this theme can be applied to content areas such as immigration. This theme evaluates how individuals, groups, and institutions in the U.S. have both promoted and hindered people's struggle for freedom, equality, and social justice, and analyze how the concept of the American Dream has changed for various groups over time.

In addition to guiding content strands and themes, some state standards incorporate immigration and migration into other stories—not just the dominant narratives regarding immigration (such as the founding of America or turn-of-the-twentieth-century European immigration). Most

commonly, standards emphasize the connection between immigration, industrialization, and labor. In Indiana, for instance, students discuss the relationship between industrialization and immigration in the late nineteenth century, and its impact on social movements of the era. Other states emphasize immigration and migration in the history of African Americans. Maryland's standards include a distinct K-12 curriculum for African-American history and culture. Mississippi and Arkansas both offer high school social studies elective courses in African American studies. The Mississippi course explores immigration/migration within its civil/human rights strand, and encourages students to consider the economic, cultural, and political causes and effects of the Great Migration and the forced migration of African Americans in the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Students also investigate the role of racism in these movements, the ways African Americans worked to maintain identities, the African Diaspora, and the contributions of black immigrants in the United States. In Arkansas, students analyze migration patterns, both involuntary and voluntary, from Africa to America, and examine the social, economic, and political actions of African Americans in the twentieth century.

Post-1965 Immigration and Migration

Since the creation of the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act (Hart-Cellar Act), the numbers of immigrants, their countries of origin, and their reception in the United States have all changed dramatically. The historical context of these past fifty years adds complexity and import to the story of migrations to and around the United States, making older migrations more relatable to the present and explaining the origins of current migration trends. Seventy percent of state standards discuss "current immigration" or directly mention immigration trends, events, and legislation from the past fifty years. However, contemporary immigration and migration is usually discussed in political terms, often leaving out any sort of historical context. Standards commonly expect students to analyze current immigration as an aspect of U.S. foreign policy. For instance, the Illinois social studies standards include immigration as a current political event or an issue that links the people of Illinois to the rest of the nation. Other states, such as Florida, expect high school students to examine the nation's changing immigration policies and attitudes since 1950. The Texas standards expect students to analyze the causes and effects of legal and illegal immigration to the United States. A few states include the historical context of post-1965 migrations, most notably California, Maryland, and New York, where standards specifically mention the Immigration Acts of 1965 and 1986 alongside continuing debates over immigration reform.

Supplemental Materials

In addition to state social studies standards, many departments of education provide resources to clarify standards and help educators integrate standard content into classroom curriculum. Model curriculum units, framework documents, and content assessments explain more fully the standards, offer sample lesson plans, and/or provide further information for educators on social studies topics (including links, for example, to local history cultural institutions, the National Council for the Social Studies, or websites relating to a variety of historical topics). Twenty-six of the states include supplemental resources that address directly immigration and migration history.

In many instances, framework documents and content assessments are created alongside state standards. These documents, when included, differ from state to state, but usually present more thorough explanations of content within the standards and are intended to guide the development of social studies curriculum (often including curriculum lesson plans). In Vermont, standards are divided into a more generalized “grade expectations” document and a “framework of standards” that offer greater depth in their discussions of immigration/migration related themes. According to the Vermont Agency of Education, its social studies frameworks are intended to explicitly detail what may be included in state assessments and to provide a structure around which classroom curriculum should be organized. According to Vermont Director of Secondary and Adult Education Thomas Alderman, “the combination [of the frameworks and grade expectations] represents what the state is directing schools to include in curriculum and instruction.” California, Connecticut, Georgia, Hawaii, and several other states also offer comprehensive frameworks and assessments. Georgia’s content area frameworks, for instance, organize content into curriculum units, exploring standards’ content in greater depth. A unit in the fifth grade encourages students to more thoroughly explore the impact of movement and migration on the expanding United States, including examining the reasons for immigration and providing sample exercises using fictional and nonfictional sources to help students understand the immigrant experience.

Many states include supplemental model curriculum units, sample lesson plans, and educator resources that deal directly with immigration and migration content. The Nebraska Department of Education includes a “Standards Instructional Tool” on its website. This resource pairs a digital tool or app with each educational standard that teachers are expected to include in their curriculum. In addition, the Standards Instructional Tool explains why each tool or app was chosen to supplement each standard. Tools and apps paired with immigration/migration standards include an iBook detailing the events of the Great Migration in Omaha to show the relationships between local communities and historical events, a timeline of early migrations to North America from the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, digitized passenger lists from ships carrying immigrants to the U.S., and collections of political cartoons and other primary sources about the Chinese Exclusion Act. In addition to the Standards Instructional Tool, the Nebraska Department of Education also promotes summer history camps and local history projects that connect students to historical migration in their local communities, including the Great Migration and the Underground Railroad. Similarly, Florida’s CPALMS merges standards, curriculum units, content resources, and professional development tools in a collaborative web platform. Immigration and migration related standards are more thoroughly explained in easily-linked lesson plans and resources. For instance, eleventh-grade U.S. history standards comparing the nineteenth-century experience of European immigrants in the East with those of Asian immigrants in the West links with the lesson plan “Reading like a Historian: Chinese Immigration and Exclusion.” In this unit, students analyze primary source documents to better understand the factors that led to the Chinese Exclusion Act.

Additional Resources and Cultural Institution Partnerships

In addition to supplemental documents, some states have partnered with local cultural institutions to create unique curriculums and educator resources aligned with social studies

standards, many of which help to further students' understanding of the history of American immigration and migration. The Maryland Department of Education, for instance, has partnered with the Reginald F. Lewis Museum of Maryland African American History and Culture to create a K-12 curriculum on African American history, including high school courses exploring antebellum emigration and exodusters. Other states, such as Nebraska and Iowa, encourage educators to engage with local museums and historical societies to help students better understand the history of immigration and migration, and their community's connection to national immigration patterns.

Recommendations for Further Research

This report has several recommendations for further exploration and research into the teaching of immigration and migration in grades K-12. First, educational standards for non-social studies classes could be investigated. While only social studies standards were researched for this project, it is likely that language arts, music and other arts, foreign language, and additional subjects discuss immigration and migration history or concepts, and/or engage with history courses.

History, government and politics, human geography, and language Advanced Placement courses could also be analyzed for their treatment of immigration and migration in American society. These curriculums and other educational resources could demonstrate how more advanced classes differ from the standards that are created for a general classroom audience.

This report recommends that future studies investigate how local districts and individual educators actually implement teaching K-12 social studies standards in their classrooms. After conversations with social studies coordinators in many state departments of education, it became clear that standards created at the state level are intended only as *suggestions*, or guidelines, for local curriculum. Local districts and teachers are responsible for interpreting state standards and can choose historical examples they consider to be most effective for their classroom and most useful as students prepare for state examinations. It would be important to learn what standards and supplemental resources are actually used, modified, or omitted in the classroom.

Finally, a future study could explore private schools' treatment of immigration and migration. Millions of American students attend private schools across the country, many of which use different educational standards and resources. Understanding how private and public schools compare would be valuable and would help Smithsonian staff create educational resources that are useful to an even greater number of teachers.

Recommendations for New Educational Resources

This report has highlighted ways in which the teaching of U.S. immigration/migration in K-12 classrooms could be enriched. While it may not be possible to alter standards documents themselves, additional educator resources could be created that provide more detailed background information, lesson plans and student exercises, and curriculum content. These

resources should focus particular attention on more complex narratives of migration/immigration, cultural interaction and exchange, and contemporary (post-1965) immigration. A database of social studies education resources (including professional development tools, curriculum and lesson plan ideas, standards and supplemental documents from all states, and links to cultural institutions) highlighting the long history of immigration and migration within the United States could also be developed.

Research Graphs



