TRAVERSE®

Core Curriculum | Grades 6–12

ADVANCING ACCESS TO EFFECTIVE SOCIAL STUDIES WITH HIGH-QUALITY INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS (HQIM)

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1 WHAT DOES HQIM MEAN?

HQIM are recognized as materials that are aligned to state standards and include evidence-based strategies, inclusive practices, and embedded teacher supports — although the criteria do vary from state to state and discipline to discipline.



2 THE CHALLENGE

There's no doubt that effective teaching is incredibly important for student outcomes. According to RAND,[1] educators have the highest impact on student achievement compared to "any other aspects of schooling." But over the last decade, a growing body of research has also linked positive student outcomes to HQIM. Yes, teachers matter — but so do curriculum materials.

The problem is teachers frequently bear the burden of finding their own classroom resources, dedicating between 7 and 12 hours per week to sourcing and creating instructional materials.[2] This practice not only takes precious time away from teachers, but often results in variations in instruction from one classroom to another, from school to school, and from district to district, making coherence across grades nearly impossible. Analysis of instructional materials found online — specifically on Teachers Pay Teachers, Share My Lesson, and ReadWriteThink — shows that they often fall short in aligning with academic standards and are below grade level.[3] Even more worryingly, students of color and those from low-income backgrounds are less likely to have access to high-quality materials and grade-level assignments.[4] The fact is, teachers are not curriculum development specialists — nor should they need to be. They should, however, be given the appropriate tools to do what they do best: teach.

"A more consistent, equitable commonsense approach would be to relieve teachers of curriculum development responsibilities and let them focus their energy where it matters most for student outcomes — on classroom instruction."

– Stephanie Hirsh and Jim Short, "The Elements: Transforming Teaching through Curriculum-Based Professional Learning," 2022

In social studies, these challenges are particularly apparent. Compared with other disciplines, such as math and ELA, social studies has been historically undervalued. Now, district leaders across the country acknowledge that the subject is an essential discipline, but years of neglect have created a deep-rooted problem. Social studies teachers identify that instructional materials are often unable to support positive learning outcomes,[5] and therefore a significant amount of teachers source their own — up to 79%, according to the Fordham Institute.[6] On top of this, many do not feel prepared to support civic development, an essential aspect of social studies.[7]

[1] Opper, M. I. (2019). Teachers Matter: Understanding Teachers' Impact on Student Achievement. RAND Corporation. https://www.rand.org/education-and-labor/projects/measuring-teacher-effectiveness/teachers-matter.html

[2] Chan, J. (2022). 3 Common Misconceptions about High-Quality Instructional Materials. EdReports. https://www.edreports.org/resources/article/3-common-misconceptions-about-high-quality-instructional-materials

[3] Polikoff, M., Dean J. (2009). The Supplemental Curriculum Bazaar: Is What's Online Any Good? Thomas B. Fordham Institute. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED601253.pdf

[4] EdReports. Why Materials Matter. https://edreports.org/impact/why-materials-matter

[5] Newsela (2019). Social Studies is Changing. https://go.newsela.com/rs/628-ZPE-510/images/social-studies-is-changing.pdf

[6] Grossman, N. (2009). The Sad State of Social Studies. Thomas B. Fordham Institute. https://fordhaminstitute.org/national/commentary/sad-state-social-studies-instruction

[7] Hamilton, L. S., Kaufman, J. H., & Hu, L. (2020). Preparing children and youth for civic life in the era of truth decay: Insights from the American Teacher Panel. RAND Corporation. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA112-6.html

3 THE IMPACT OF HQIM ON SOCIAL STUDIES

More than simply teaching facts about the past, social studies serves as a gateway to learning about the world and its societal structures, historical contexts, and cultural intricacies. The subject fosters key critical thinking and analytical skills, preparing students for college and careers and empowering them to become engaged citizens ready to make informed choices. Access to HQIM in social studies has been found to promote these key skills[8] and help students make positive civic contributions.

"Democratic societies rely on high-quality social studies instruction, cultivating students who delve deeper into issues and problems that vex humankind."
– Hatti, Stern, Fisher, and Frey, 2020

Definitions of HQIM vary, but at their core they share vital components. At Imagine Learning, all of our core programs are designed to deliver key benchmarks for HQIM.







[8] American Institutes for Research. The search for high-quality instructional materials in social studies. https://www.air.org/resource/search-high-quality-instructional-materials-social-studies

4 TRAVERSE: A COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM TO 6–12 SOCIAL STUDIES

Traverse is designed to reflect social studies teachers' needs for an ever-evolving set of resources. It includes flexible, customizable content to empower teachers to approach instruction with confidence and to engage students through a variety of modalities for different learning styles.

Standards Alignment

Traverse maximizes learning by providing content focused on the standards teachers need to cover. Content is aligned to the C3 (College, Career, and Civic Life) Framework and state standards, with robust customization tools to support varied classroom needs.

Equity and Inclusion

Traverse fosters an inclusive environment that supports diverse needs, interests, strengths, and struggles — empowering every learner to engage and see themselves in the curriculum. The program includes flexible implementation and supports, including:

- Automatic leveled scaffolds and differentiation for English language learners, approaching readers, and beyond-grade-level learners
- Digital accessibility measures, including leveled narrative text, audio read-aloud with speed control, line reader, and annotation tools

Traverse incorporates a variety of diverse perspectives, experiences, and authorship, and includes a rigorous review process to ensure quality and accuracy

Measuring Student Learning

Formative assessments are featured in every section of Traverse, providing teachers with multiple opportunities to monitor student progress during the chapter. Additionally, Traverse features modular summative assessments at the end of each unit that can be edited or split.

Best Practice Pedagogy

Traverse's inquiry tasks, developed in collaboration with renowned educators Kathy Swan and Sam Wineburg, ask students to analyze primary and secondary sources. Students explore problems, ideas, or questions, while teachers act as facilitators, helping them to develop hypotheses, investigate evidence, and draw conclusions. Students' learning journeys are supported by spiraled skill instruction, giving them opportunities to practice key skills while exploring new questions.

Teacher and Student Experience

Traverse is built with powerful customization features and tools to benefit and enhance student learning. It offers multiple pathways of instruction for each chapter, and teacher materials are chunked into sections for ease of use. Pacing and planning guides are provided for each unit and chapter, to aid lesson planning and implementation.

Professional Learning

Traverse's digital platform offers comprehensive teacher support, from the innovative pop-out digital teacher edition for seamless access to support materials, pacing, and planning support for each unit and chapter — along with reading comprehension and source analysis strategies.

Traverse also provides unparalleled implementation support, partnering with districts to ensure teachers use the program effectively. Mirroring the program itself, Traverse professional learning sessions are inquiry-based and collaborative.