

OLR Backgrounder: Holocaust and Genocide Instruction in Public Schools

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Issue

Describe the state's curriculum guidance for teaching the Holocaust and genocide studies in public schools.

Summary

Connecticut law has required public school districts to teach Holocaust and genocide education and awareness as part of their social studies curriculum since the 2018-19 school year ([PA 18-24](#), codified at [CGS § 10-16b\(a\)](#)).

While school districts are free to design their own curricula, the state provides standards and resources to assist them. We examined two of these, the State Board of Education (SBE)-approved [2023 Connecticut Elementary and Secondary Social Studies Standards](#) and the State Department of Education's (SDE) online resource page "[Teaching the Holocaust and Genocide](#)," and found that both contained guidance and resources that address the Holocaust and other genocides.

State Curriculum Resources

Social Studies Standards

SBE approved new social studies standards in October 2023, which will replace the 2015 standards. (It is unclear when they will go into effect; the adopting resolution explains that schools and districts will receive professional development as part of the rollout.) For high school students, there are four standards that address the Holocaust and three addressing genocides other than the Holocaust; there are none in the elementary or middle school standards.

The Holocaust. Two standards are part of the high school Modern World History (MW) standards:

- MW-5. Global Conflicts and Decolonization:
 - MW.His.1.f. Investigate the ways in which antisemitic beliefs and other discriminatory policies in Europe led to the persecution and murder of millions of Jews as well as Roma, disabled people, LGBTQ+ individuals, and political prisoners during the Holocaust (e.g., Nuremberg Race Laws, Final Solution, Aktion T4).
 - MW.His.9.a. Synthesize sources from the Holocaust to develop questions and explore the experiences of survivors, victims, resisters, collaborators, bystanders, and rescuers (e.g., survivor testimony, memoirs, government documents, museums exhibits, historical fiction, and film).

The other two standards are part of the high school United States History (US) standards:

- US-5. World War II:
 - US.His.1.c. Evaluate the role of economic and political developments that created the conditions leading to WWII and the Holocaust (e.g., Great Depression, nationalism, militarism).
 - US.His.1.e. Evaluate the United States government's complex responses to the Holocaust while recognizing the history of antisemitism in both historical and contemporary contexts (e.g., Voyage of the St. Louis, lack of response to the Final Solution, Nuremberg Trials).

Genocide. Two standards are part of the high school Modern World History (MW) standards:

- MW-5. Global Conflicts and Decolonization:
 - MW.His.4.c. Analyze the complex and interacting factors that led to genocide during different historical eras (e.g., Armenia, Uganda, Cambodia, Bosnia, Rwanda, Darfur).
- MW-6. Economic Globalization and Global Governance:
 - MW.Civ.5.a. Analyze national and international responses to refugee crises sparked by natural disasters, war, and genocide (e.g., Ukraine, Syria, Rohingya, Somalia, Latin America).

The third is part of the high school United States History (US) standards:

- US-8. National Identity in the Digital Age:
 - US.His.2.b. Assess the US response to human rights violations around the world (e.g., genocide, support for free elections, sanctions, humanitarian aid, funds for human rights organizations).

Additional Standards

In addition to the standards listed above, three other high school standards refer to the Holocaust or genocide tangentially as examples of study areas related to World War II, governance and human rights, and Modern World History:

- US-5. World War II:
 - US.His.16.c. Develop arguments about the juxtaposition between the United States' founding ideals and actions of the Federal government during World War II using evidence from multiple relevant sources (e.g., Japanese-American Internment, Holocaust intervention, Braceros Program, Fair Employment Practices Act, segregated regiments, women in the military).
- 7-2. Governance and Human Rights:
 - 7.His.9.a. Classify the kinds of historical sources used in a secondary interpretations of a globally or regionally significant event or issue (e.g., genocide, natural disasters, climate change, refugee crises, human trafficking).
- MW-1. Exchange and Interconnections:
 - MW.Geo.6.a. Evaluate the impact of settlement on the environmental and cultural characteristics of the early modern world (e.g., hacienda, encomienda, Jesuit missionaries, East India Company, Ottoman Empire, unification of Japan, Indigenous genocide).

“Ready Made” Resources

SDE's “Teaching the Holocaust and Genocide” [webpage](#) contains links to lessons and materials by outside organizations (such as the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum) that districts can use to teach the Holocaust and genocide to high school students. In addition to the Holocaust, the [resources](#) address the Syrian refugee crisis and genocides of the Rohingya and in Rwanda and Cambodia.

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