

To the members of the State Board of Education,

We, the members of the Charlottesville School Board, are writing to request that the Board **return to its usual process of consideration and approval of the state's K-12 history standards as developed and recommended in August 2022 by history educators, professors, historians, parents, and others.** We strongly encourage the VDOE to stay the course on its longstanding commitment to developing a more inclusive and honest curriculum.

The “August” Revisions

Throughout 2020-22, our Commonwealth trusted a committee of history educators, historians, museum professionals, parents, and community groups to conduct the scheduled seven-year revision of our state history standards. Over the course of two years, in a very public fashion, this committee made thoughtful and informed decisions. In addition, this work built upon the efforts and recommendations of Virginia's 2020 African American History Education Commission. We would like the Board to follow its usual procedures to consider and then adopt these standards.

The “November” Alternate Standards

By contrast, the surprise alternate standards announced by the Youngkin administration on a Friday night in November were hastily developed by a consultant without public input and without the participation of the VDOE subject-area experts. This led to a number of ill-informed recommendations, such as omitting African American history to such a degree that not even Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was included in the original version. The idea that Virginia's indigenous tribes and communities would be portrayed as “immigrants” is also inaccurate and offensive. Units of study about ancient China and Mali were both removed from the K-5 curriculum. These errors and omissions underscore the haste of the process, the lack of public review, and the political motivation to prioritize White, European perspectives. After the Board correctly rejected these November standards, there is now a consideration of merging the August and November standards, but a quick mash-up of the two sets will not lead to a thoughtful or cohesive curriculum.

A Shared Goal to Teach Our Whole History

The Governor has stated that his goal is “to teach our history, the good and the bad.” As parents, teachers, and students have recently shared in public comment, Virginians agree that our students should be learning whole-truth history that explores multiple perspectives and experiences. The best way to do that is to consider and adopt the original August recommendations and to follow the VDOE's own time-honored approval processes.

This past spring in Charlottesville, a group of fourth-grade students at Clark Elementary explored our own schools' desegregation story and then wrote letters to members of the Charlottesville 12, those Black students who bravely integrated all-white schools in 1959. As part of the students' letters, one common theme emerged: “It was hard to learn this history, but I am glad we did.” Please take the steps to assure that Virginia's students continue to have access to a curriculum that is challenging but rewarding, one that builds understanding, empathy, and a sense of connectedness to the people of our past, present, and future. Thank you for your service!