

PREFACE

This document replaces *The Ontario Curriculum: Social Sciences and Humanities, Grades 9–10, 1999* and *The Ontario Curriculum: Social Sciences and Humanities, Grades 11–12, 2000*. Beginning in September 2014, all social sciences and humanities courses for Grades 9–12 will be based on the expectations outlined in this document.

SECONDARY SCHOOLS FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

The goal of Ontario secondary schools is to support high-quality learning while giving individual students the opportunity to choose programs that suit their skills and interests. The updated Ontario curriculum, in combination with a broader range of learning options outside traditional classroom instruction, will enable students to better customize their high school education and improve their prospects for success in school and in life.

The revised curriculum recognizes that, today and in the future, students need to be critically literate in order to synthesize information, make informed decisions, communicate effectively, and thrive in an ever-changing global community. It is important that students be connected to the curriculum; that they see themselves in what is taught, how it is taught, and how it applies to the world at large. The curriculum recognizes that the needs of learners are diverse, and helps all learners develop the knowledge, skills, and perspectives they need to be informed, productive, caring, responsible, healthy, and active citizens in their own communities and in the world.

SUPPORTING STUDENTS' WELL-BEING AND ABILITY TO LEARN

Promoting the healthy development of all students, as well as enabling all students to reach their full potential, is a priority for educators across Ontario. Students' health and well-being contribute to their ability to learn in all disciplines, including social sciences and humanities, and that learning in turn contributes to their overall well-being.

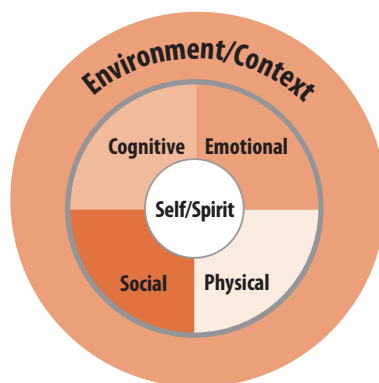
Educators play an important role in promoting children and youth's well-being by creating, fostering, and sustaining a learning environment that is healthy, caring, safe, inclusive, and accepting. A learning environment of this kind will support not only students' cognitive, emotional, social, and physical development but also their mental health, their resilience, and their overall state of well-being. All this will help them achieve their full potential in school and in life.

A variety of factors, known as the "determinants of health", have been shown to affect a person's overall state of well-being. Some of these are income, education and literacy, gender and culture, physical and social environment, personal health practices and coping skills, and availability of health services. Together, such factors influence not

only whether a person is physically healthy but also the extent to which he or she will have the physical, social, and personal resources needed to cope and to identify and achieve personal aspirations. These factors also have an impact on student learning, and it is important to be aware of them as factors contributing to a student's performance.

An educator's awareness of and responsiveness to students' cognitive, emotional, social, and physical development is critical to their success in school. A number of research-based frameworks, including those described in *Early Learning for Every Child Today: A Framework for Ontario Early Childhood Settings* (2007) and *Stepping Stones: A Resource on Youth Development* (2012),¹ identify developmental stages that are common to the majority of students from Kindergarten to Grade 12. At the same time, these frameworks recognize that individual differences, as well as differences in life experiences and exposure to opportunities, can affect development, and that developmental events are not specifically age-dependent.

The framework described in *Stepping Stones* is based on a model that illustrates the complexity of human development. Its components – the cognitive, emotional, physical, and social domains – are interrelated and interdependent, and all are subject to the influence of a person's environment or context. At the centre is an "enduring (yet changing) core" – a sense of self, or spirit – that connects the different aspects of development and experience (p. 17).



Source: *Stepping Stones: A Resource on Youth Development*, p.17

Educators who have an awareness of a student's development take each component into account, with an understanding of and focus on the following elements:

- **cognitive development** – brain development, processing and reasoning skills, use of strategies for learning
- **emotional development** – emotional regulation, empathy, motivation
- **social development** – self-development (self-concept, self-efficacy, self-esteem); identity formation (gender identity, social group identity, spiritual identity); relationships (peer, family, romantic)
- **physical development** – physical activity, sleep patterns, changes that come with puberty, body image, nutritional requirements

1. Best Start Expert Panel on *Early Learning*, *Early Learning for Every Child Today: A Framework for Ontario Early Childhood Settings* (2007) is available at http://www.children.gov.on.ca/htdocs/English/topics/earlychildhood/early_learning_for_every_child_today.aspx, and Government of Ontario, *Stepping Stones: A Resource on Youth Development* (2012), is available at http://www.children.gov.on.ca/htdocs/English/topics/youthopportunities/steppingstones/youth_policy.aspx.

The Role of Mental Health

Mental health touches all components of development. Mental health is much more than the absence of mental illness. Well-being is influenced not only by the absence of problems and risks but by the presence of factors that contribute to healthy growth and development. By nurturing and supporting students' strengths and assets, educators help promote positive mental health in the classroom. At the same time, they can identify students who need additional support and connect them with the appropriate services.²

What happens at school can have a significant influence on a student's well-being. With a broader awareness of mental health, educators can plan instructional strategies that contribute to a supportive classroom climate for learning in all subject areas, build awareness of mental health, and reduce stigma associated with mental illness. Taking students' well-being, including their mental health, into account when planning instructional approaches helps establish a strong foundation for learning.

2. The Ministry of Education is making materials available to Ontario schools and school boards to support educators in this regard.

INTRODUCTION

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES CURRICULUM

The discipline of social sciences and humanities in the Ontario secondary school curriculum encompasses five subject areas: equity studies, family studies, general social sciences, philosophy, and world religions. Although these subject areas are very different from one another, they all systematically explore the ways in which individuals influence and are influenced by families, communities, cultures, institutions, and societies, and by ideas, norms, and values.

The social sciences – represented in this curriculum by courses in equity studies, family studies, and general social sciences – explore individual and collective human behaviour and needs as well as patterns and trends in society. Courses in this area shed light on a variety of social structures, institutions, relationships, and power dynamics. The humanities – represented in the curriculum by courses in philosophy and world religions – explore fundamental questions and ideas about human nature and the human condition. In all five subject areas encompassed by the secondary program in social sciences and humanities, students are exposed to social theories, specialized concepts, and research findings, as well as a range of tools related to investigation and analysis, to help them understand themselves, their families, their communities, and society as they strive to find meaning in the world around them.

Students in social sciences and humanities develop a critical lens through which they can build their awareness of and make decisions with respect to critical issues in our increasingly complex, multifaceted, and diverse society. Study of this discipline helps to build understanding about individuals, families, and diverse groups – what people think, how they live, and how we all interact with one another and the world around us. Knowledge and understanding developed through the study of social sciences and humanities can help inform discussion on critical social, cultural, economic, technological, environmental, and wellness issues, and can provide a strong foundation for vibrant, healthy, and engaged citizenship.

Study in social sciences and humanities requires systematic inquiry: through sustained practice, students develop their planning, processing, problem-solving, and decision-making capabilities, often while exploring issues of deep personal relevance. The essential questions with which students engage in these courses are often thought provoking and open ended, and have no single correct answer. The questions stimulate inquiry, debate, and further questions, and can be re-examined over time. Systematic inquiry in social sciences and humanities can help students analyse problems and determine appropriate actions that they can take as individuals, or that can be taken by families, diverse groups, and even societies in response to complex local or global challenges.

Social sciences and humanities courses provide students with essential knowledge and transferable skills that are applicable in various areas of their lives – in their personal and family lives as well as in their postsecondary studies and in the workplace. Individual courses provide students with a foundation for a variety of possible postsecondary destinations: positions in the retail and service industries; college programs in community services (e.g., early childhood education, child and youth work, and developmental services work), creative endeavours (e.g., the fashion industry, fashion design, garment construction, and food preparation), or business (e.g., human resources); and university programs in fields such as anthropology, business studies, education, environmental studies, family and child studies, food and nutrition sciences, gender studies, health sciences, human resources, philosophy, psychology, religious studies, social work, and sociology.

The discipline of social sciences and humanities, and its related knowledge and skills, has connections with many other disciplines taught in secondary school. Through their studies in social sciences and humanities courses, students are able to bring a broader perspective, integrate useful knowledge, and apply critical-thinking skills when studying other subjects such as history, geography, arts, and English.

IDEAS UNDERLYING THE SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES CURRICULUM

Effective learning in all subjects of the social sciences and humanities curriculum depends on the development of skills and understanding in four areas:

- ***Disciplined Inquiry and Critical Literacy:*** Social sciences and humanities courses focus on the use of disciplined, structured inquiry to understand human beings, human behaviour, and human nature. These courses promote the use of reason as part of the structured inquiry process, while also recognizing the limitations of reason as a way of learning, knowing, and understanding. They encourage students to identify and question assumptions and values that underlie individual behaviour and family and social/cultural life. Developing their critical literacy skills enables students to challenge texts, reading “underneath, behind, and beyond” texts and questioning how they influence us and others and whose interests they serve.
- ***Problem Solving:*** Social sciences and humanities courses require students to engage actively in solving problems confronted by individuals, families, diverse groups, institutions, and societies. The problems that students confront in these courses vary from the abstract and theoretical to the everyday and concrete. These problems are often morally and politically complex, with solutions that are sometimes controversial because they affect diverse individuals and groups differently.
- ***Understanding of Self and Others:*** Students in social sciences and humanities courses are provided with rich opportunities to enhance their self-understanding and understanding of others through an examination of their personal belief systems and also of the foundations and implications of different viewpoints and lived experiences of others. Through a juxtaposition of their own perceptions, attitudes, values, and beliefs with those of others, students develop an understanding and appreciation of the contexts through which their own and others’ world views are formed.

- **Local and Global Mindedness:** Social sciences and humanities courses develop students' awareness that people do not live in isolation; each person affects and is affected by his or her social, cultural, economic, and environmental context. Students examine the norms underlying different familial, societal, institutional, and cultural practices. Students are encouraged to be mindful of their responsibilities with respect to the environment and of the importance of making morally and ethically responsible decisions. Students explore how theories and concepts can influence social action, and how such action can affect the well-being of individuals, families, and communities throughout the world.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES PROGRAM

Students

Students' responsibilities with respect to their own learning develop gradually and increase over time as they progress through elementary and secondary school. With appropriate instruction and with experience, students come to see how applied effort can enhance learning and improve achievement. As they mature and develop their ability to persist, to manage their behaviour and impulses, to take responsible risks, and to listen with understanding, students become better able to take more responsibility for their learning and progress. There are some students, however, who are less able to take full responsibility for their learning because of special challenges they face. The attention, patience, and encouragement of teachers can be extremely important to the success of these students. Learning to take responsibility for their improvement and achievement is an important part of every student's education.

Developing a fluency with social science and humanities concepts, research and inquiry skills, and critical thinking and other appropriate habits of mind requires a sincere commitment to active engagement and sustained practice. Students can further contribute to their own learning by exploring the connections between the concepts addressed in their social sciences and humanities courses and their own lived experience and current events.

Parents

Parents³ have an important role to play in supporting student learning. Studies show that students perform better in school if their parents are involved in their education. By becoming familiar with the curriculum, parents can better appreciate what is being taught in the courses their daughters and sons are taking and what they are expected to learn. This awareness will enhance parents' ability to discuss their children's work with them, to communicate with teachers, and to ask relevant questions about their children's progress. Knowledge of the expectations will also enhance parents' ability to work with teachers to improve their children's learning.

Effective ways in which parents can support their children's learning include attending parent-teacher interviews, participating in parent workshops, and becoming involved in school council activities (including becoming a school council member). Parents who encourage and monitor homework or project completion further support their children in their social sciences and humanities studies.

3. The word *parent(s)* is used in this document to refer to parent(s) and guardian(s). It may also be taken to include caregivers or close family members who are responsible for raising the child.

Parents can contribute to students' success in the social sciences and humanities classroom by helping their children make connections between ideas and issues in the curriculum and other areas of life. To support their children's learning, parents may wish to demonstrate an active interest in current events and issues relating to social sciences and humanities, and to provide their children with opportunities to question and reflect on the impact of these events and issues on their immediate lives, their families, their communities, and society in general. Parents can also provide valuable support by encouraging children to take part in activities that develop responsible citizenship (e.g., volunteering at a community organization, or writing letters to the editor or their member of Parliament on issues of concern).

In many social sciences and humanities courses, students will have opportunities to work with a variety of equipment and materials. To ensure students' safety and their full participation in the experiential learning components of these courses, parents should inform teachers of their children's allergies and/or food restrictions. Parents can also help ensure that their children come to school prepared to participate safely in hands-on activities such as sewing or food-preparation activities.

Teachers

Teachers and students have complementary responsibilities. Teachers develop appropriate instructional strategies to help students achieve the curriculum expectations, as well as appropriate methods for assessing and evaluating student learning. Teachers bring enthusiasm and varied teaching and assessment approaches to the classroom, addressing different student needs and ensuring sound learning opportunities for every student. Teachers reflect on the results of the learning opportunities they provide, and make adjustments to them as necessary to help every student achieve the curriculum expectations to the best of his or her ability.

Using a variety of instructional, assessment, and evaluation strategies, teachers provide numerous opportunities for students to develop and refine their critical-thinking, problem-solving, and communication skills while engaged in social sciences and humanities activities, projects, and exploration. The activities offered should give students opportunities to relate their knowledge of and skills in the social sciences and humanities to the social, environmental, and economic conditions and concerns of the world in which they live. Such opportunities will motivate students to participate in their communities as responsible and engaged citizens and to become lifelong learners.

Teachers can help students understand that problem solving of any kind often requires a considerable expenditure of time and energy and a good deal of perseverance. Teachers can also encourage students to explore alternative solutions and to take the risks necessary to become successful problem solvers.

Social sciences and humanities teachers provide students with frequent opportunities to practise their skills and apply new learning and, through regular and varied assessment, give them the specific feedback they need in order to further develop and refine their skills. By assigning tasks that promote the development of higher-order thinking skills, teachers help students assess information, develop informed opinions, draw conclusions, and become thoughtful and effective communicators.