

New Hampshire House Bill 2 and its Impact on Social Studies Education

New Hampshire Social Studies Standards

What is House Bill 2?

House Bill 544 was a bill proposed to the state legislature and later took shape through House Bill 2, a budget bill, passed in 2021. The original bill "... defines and prohibits the dissemination of certain divisive concepts related to sex and race in state contracts, grants, and training programs"(New Hampshire hb544, 2021). State contractors refer to any person or business that has any type of contract with the state of New Hampshire. This also applies to any place that receives state money. Under this definition, all public schools must adhere to this bill as all public schools in New Hampshire receive some amount of state funding.

The original House Bill 544 defined "divisive concepts" as a concept that:
 (a) One race or sex is inherently superior to another race or sex;
 (b) The state of New Hampshire or the United States is fundamentally racist or sexist;
 (c) An individual, by his or her race or sex, is inherently racist, sexist, or oppressive, whether consciously or unconsciously;
 (d) An individual should be discriminated against or receive adverse treatment solely or partly because of his or her race or sex;
 (e) Members of one race or sex cannot and should not attempt to treat others without respect to race or sex;
 (f) An individual's moral character is necessarily determined by his or her race or sex;
 (g) An individual, by his or her race or sex, bears responsibility for actions committed in the past by other members of the same race or sex;
 (h) Any individual should feel discomfort, guilt, anguish, or any other form of psychological distress on account of his or her race or sex; or
 (i) Meritocracy or traits such as a hard work ethic are racist or sexist or were created by a particular race to oppress another race.
 (j) The term "divisive concepts" includes any other form of race or sex stereotyping or any other form of race or sex scapegoating.

The current language featured in House Bill 2 sections 297-298, under the title " Prohibition on Teaching Discrimination."
 "1. No pupil in any public school in this state shall be taught, instructed, inculcated or compelled to express belief in, or support for, any one or more of the following:
 (a) That one's age, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, race, creed, color, marital status, familial status, mental or physical disability, religion or national origin is inherently superior to people of another age, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, race, creed, color, marital status, familial status, mental or physical disability, religion, or national origin;
 (b) That an individual, by virtue of his or her age, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, race, creed, color, marital status, familial status, mental or physical disability, religion, or national origin, is inherently racist, sexist, or oppressive, whether consciously or unconsciously;
 (c) That an individual should be discriminated against or receive adverse treatment solely or partly because of his or her age, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, race, creed, color, marital status, familial status, mental or physical disability, religion, or national origin; or
 (d) That people of one age, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, race, creed, color, marital status, familial status, mental or physical disability, religion, or national origin cannot and should not attempt to treat others without regard to age, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, race, creed, color, marital status, familial status, mental or physical disability, religion, or national origin."

"You can discuss it, but objectively"- Rep. Keith Ammon

"This bill silences the discussions on systemic racism"- NH Teacher

"There has to be some sort of trust that we can do our jobs"- NH Principal

In a podcast by New Hampshire Public Radio, Representative Keith Ammon, a member of the New Hampshire State Senate and the Republican Party and a supporter of HB 2, argues that this law does not completely ban the discussion of these topics, it just mandates that it be done in an objective manner that will not be considered divisive. Who decides the objectivity of a topic is largely up to the school board, parents of the community, and the Department of Education. However, New Hampshire Educators feel that this bill puts them in a bind and limits what they can do in the classroom. One New Hampshire principal argued that communities need to trust teachers. The educational preparation teachers go through (bachelor and/or master degrees, student teachers, continuing education courses) showcases that teachers know what they're doing. Another New Hampshire teacher feels that the bill makes it harder for classrooms to have meaningful discussions on systemic racism and oppression.

Social Studies is a subject that often gets pushed aside or lumped into others. State social studies standards in New Hampshire have not been updated since 2006. Those standards minimum requirements are that "elementary and middle/junior high school students "acquire knowledge and understanding of civics, economics, geography, and history" and require that high school students "acquire knowledge and modes of inquiry" in the same four subjects "including the related areas of sociology, anthropology, and psychology" (K-12 Social Studies New Hampshire Curriculum Framework, 2006).

State law requires that standards be updated every ten years, however, Education Commissioner Frank Edelblut says social studies standards don't fall under that category and that the timeline is up to the State Board of Education. The State Board has cited the COVID-19 pandemic as the cause for the delay, yet in 2024, teachers are still left with no updated standards. In 2021, Fordham Institute gave New Hampshire an F on its social studies framework for its "weak" and "vague" standards. However, Edelblut says the standards from 2006 are "more than adequate and more than appropriate to be able to make sure that our students are getting a good understanding of social studies topics" (Gibson, 2022).

With this contrasting view, school districts are left to decide whether or not to use the outdated state standards or refer to the national social studies standards. Some schools end up not having a dedicated social studies program, putting the stress on teachers to come up with their own social studies curriculum. Others opt to use the National C3 Framework: College, Career, and Civic Life which shifts the focus for "...students to become more prepared the challenges of college and career is united with a third critical element: preparation" (C3 Framework, 2013).

"We've got \$500 for the person that first successfully catches a public school teacher breaking this law" - Moms For Liberty NH Twitter

Statements from powerful organizations were put out after the bill was passed. These messages attempt to scare New Hampshire teachers away from talking about complicated issues such as systemic racism in their classrooms.

Timeline



What Educators Are Saying

During my research, I interviewed three New Hampshire educators, two teachers, and one principal. I asked them a series of questions about House Bill 2 and state social studies standards. The two teachers I interviewed used the 2006 state standards while the principal revealed that their school did not have any set program for social studies education at the elementary level. Compared to other states, one principal felt that New Hampshire was behind in terms of social studies education and that the Bill might be contributing to that. They also observe that the bill can make it harder for teachers to do their jobs, creating division between the community and the school.

House Bill 2 has proven to impact all levels of education, from elementary schools to colleges. A University Professor expressed their views in one of Ms. Magazine's recent articles, saying, "As a unionized, tenure-track professor, I have academic freedom and built-in support systems if my teaching is challenged. Yet, my teaching students are not guaranteed the same support" (Hendricks, 2023). Professors, too, are being impacted by this law as they are unsure of how to support future teachers. At the elementary level, educators also feel there has been a lack of professional development surrounding the bill. At one New Hampshire school, teachers recalled having one seven-minute-long meeting where their admin read the bill. They have since not had any additional professional development or training regarding the new bill.

"Bills like HB 544 create tension between communities and schools"- New Hampshire Principal.

Today: House Bill 2, which includes the Right to Freedom from Discrimination in Public Workplaces and Education Act is in effect, with no updated NH Social Studies State Standards.

House Bill 2 and the lack of updated social studies puts teachers in a bind. What should they do?

- Continue to stay up to date with laws and standards coming up.
- Teach what you know is the best practice, reflect on your students' needs, and teach to those.
- Ask questions to your colleagues, principals, administration, and school board.
- Teach the curriculum guidelines. Be sure to do research on your material and be able to provide background information on why you are teaching what you are teaching.
- Join a union. New Hampshire's NEA provides various member benefits including legal representation and posts updates on legislation surrounding education..

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