

Good evening grade 6 families:

I wanted to reach out in response to questions that I have heard from the community regarding our school's approach to social studies in the transitional grades of 5 and 6. As a team, Mr. Brady and I have discussed how we can use social studies as a vehicle for teaching students critical skills that they will need across the rest of their middle school years and well into their high school and college careers: specifically, reading texts closely, being able to identify main ideas, being able to pull evidence from a text in order to support an argument or idea, and most importantly, understanding the value of returning to work more than once and understanding that revision is not only okay but necessary.

This is different from what social studies has looked like in the past. I know that this reflects a shift and that it is more rigorous, but in the end, I am confident that we are better preparing our students with more perseverance and reading skills. Please know that Mr. Brady is working to provide students multiple opportunities to return to their work and to improve their skills. This means that, although a student may see a "low grade" they will be allowed consistent opportunities, with feedback, to return to their work, to continue to hone their skills, and in the end, to improve their grade.

Additionally, we have noticed a flaw in our new social studies digital textbook. This is being addressed so that it can be a tool to help students, rather than to hinder them.

Below, please see a message from Mr. Brady explaining this approach in greater detail. Please do not hesitate to reach out to him with questions you may have. As always, we continue to work as a staff to push our students in rigorous ways and to help make our middle schoolers the best learners they can be.

Thank you,
Mr. Dukette
Principal
Dr. Helen Baldwin Middle School

Grade 6 Social Studies

I'm happy to report that two weeks ago after students received their new Chromebooks, I was able to get students onto an online social studies platform (myhmh.com/ed) complete with a digital textbook, reading comprehension checks, and assessments. This is an excellent resource the district acquired in the past and I've looked forward to being able to use it with students.

While using the program in class, as well as with remote learners, I've found that the software side of the assessment part of the program has limitations which require me to make an adjustment. The software does not allow me, or my students, to have the type of control required over the work to allow us to achieve our goals. I am unable to cancel assignments, reset assignments for students, or share the assessments with those involved (students and parents). Students are unable to revisit answered questions or review, edit or change their work. As a result, I will be extracting the assessment material and presenting it to students in Google Docs. This will allow us to continue working on our reading and writing goals without the limitations we've met in class the last two weeks. Grades generated by the HMH web site are currently posted in Power School. These grades will not be counting towards student averages as they currently stand. I will make an adjustment and grade student work from the HMH website with a completion grade.

Moving forward, students will be graded in the following fashion: a student completes a piece of work and submits it through Google Classroom. If it were a 5 question assignment, each question would be worth

20% of the total score. If a student were to get 2 of the 5 incorrect, the score would normally be a 60%. However, students will re-work their responses after conferencing with me (in person or virtually) and resubmit their work. This process will begin again with me evaluating their work, conferencing again, and a student resubmitting their work until it is satisfactory. Building stamina, perseverance, and keeping their aim on a quality response will earn a student back all but 5% points per question. The original grade of 60% will now become a grade of 90% in Power School.

Google doc's allows me to make comments as students and I work through this process, which also will give us a history of their sustained efforts. The goal is to have students become efficient at implementing the strategies learned in reading and LA (in social studies), to generate quality responses to questions founded on text-based evidence, and to build the positive qualities of perseverance, stamina, problem-solving, and pride in a job completed.

Please feel free to reach out to me with any questions or concerns which you may have.

Mr. Brady
Grade 6 Social Studies
Dr. Helen Baldwin Middle School