

Dear Delegate LaRock and K-12 Education Committee,

My name is Dr. Sabrina Dent. I write these comments as the parent of an African American school-aged child; and, as a public scholar whose research and work is dependent on the truths about American history. ALL of American history. That is, from what is documented via written and oral histories.

Public schools are places that serve children from every racial, ethnic, social-economic, religious background, and more—they serve everyone. Thus, it is critical that our children learn the histories of Indigenous, enslaved and free Blacks, Japanese and Mexican Americans, the Holocaust, and many other events that have shaped or influenced public policies and laws. EVERY BIT OF HISTORY MATTERS!

This is a dangerous and divisive bill. It minimizes the influence and impact of American and Virginia history. How can educators teach our children about civic education without discussing the 1790 Naturalization Act that defined citizenship in America to privilege white, land-owning men with voting rights? That excludes women, Indigenous, and Black people (who were still not considered human). How can you teach about the 1964 and 1965 Voting Rights Act without discussing Evelyn Thomas Butts? She is the Black woman and civil rights activist from Norfolk who sued the governor of VA for violating her 14th amendment rights because of the polling tax. And, her case won in the Supreme Court of the United States which ended the practice of Black people paying polling taxes to vote (1966). You can't erase this history because many of our families have personal experiences that point to the realities for many racial, ethnic, and religious minority groups in America. This history must be told; otherwise, the narrative remains incomplete.

Most importantly, how can you overlook the recommendations of the National Council for the Social Studies, American Historical Association, and thirteen other professional organizations that wrote the C3 Framework for Social Studies States Standards? As outlined on page 17 of the document:

"Questioning is key to student learning. The C3 Framework encourages the use of compelling and supporting questions, both teacher- and student-generated, as a central element of the teaching and learning process."

In essence, this is a part of the learning process for students to understand concepts and historical events. Furthermore, they outlined:

"Because social studies content is based in human experience, students will have hunches about the questions under study. Rich social studies teaching, however, offers students opportunities to investigate those questions more thoroughly through disciplinary (civic, economic, geographical, or historical) and multi-disciplinary means."

It is my recommendation that this K-12 Education Committee spends some time getting acquainted with the C3 Framework and guidelines provided on page 45. The benefits of historical thinking and historical inquiry helps prepare our students to be better thinkers, citizens, and contributors to society. Teaching history as it happened is not about making a child or group feel bad but provides a way for students to learn lessons of the past to prevent tragedies from occurring in the future. This moment is on all of you to exercise moral courage in doing the right thing.

Sincerely,
Dr. Sabrina E. Dent

<https://www.socialstudies.org/sites/default/files/c3/C3-Framework-for-Social-Studies.pdf>