



Bridging Policy and Practice: Social Studies Updates with a Spotlight on Structured Academic Controversy

Florida Organization of Instructional Leaders

May 2026



FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION
fldoe.org

www.FLDOE.org

Session Objectives

- Participants will...
 - Identify upcoming changes to Social Studies Education in the state of Florida.
 - Discuss the importance of Communism education in the state of Florida.
 - Engage in a preview of a Structured Academic Controversy related to History of Communism benchmarks and required instruction.



Social Studies Updates

Social Studies Instructional Materials

- The 2027-2028 Florida instructional materials adoption cycle will call for instructional materials for K-12 Social Studies.
- The Florida Department of Education (FDOE) posted specifications in January 2026.
- The adoption list is intended to post July 31, 2027, and state-adopted materials will be available for district implementation in the 2028-2029 school year.



Civics and Government Instructional Guide



www.civicsliteracy.org

- Benchmarks
- Connecting Benchmarks
- Terms from the K-12 Glossary
- Common Misconceptions, Errors or Questions
- Instructional Resources
 - Primary resources
 - Supplemental resources
- Suggested Instructional Strategies/Tasks

Holocaust Education Instructional Guide

- The FDOE has been collaborating with the Commissioner of Education's Task Force on Holocaust Education to develop a Holocaust Education Instructional Guide.
- Initial development is focused on integrating Holocaust Education with Music Education and Culinary Arts Education.
- The guide is anticipated to be released in late September in preparation for Holocaust Education Week.



History of Communism

History of Communism Education

House Bill 395 (2022)

Victims of Communism Day established to be observed annually in High School United States Government classes.

Senate Bill 1264 (2024)

Added History of Communism topics to Required Instruction
Section (s.) 1003.42(v.)1,
Florida Statutes (F.S.)

Standards and benchmarks created by the History of Communism Workgroup to support Required Instruction.

November 13, 2025 –
Adoption of History of Communism standards and courses for implementation in the 2026-2027 school year.

Victims of Communism Day – November 7

- Excerpts from s. 683.334, F.S.
 - (1) The Governor shall proclaim **November 7 of each year as “Victims of Communism Day,”** which shall be suitably observed in the public schools of the state as a day honoring the 100 million people who have fallen victim to communist regimes across the world and which shall be suitably observed by public exercise in the State Capitol and elsewhere as the Governor may designate.
 - (3)(a) Beginning in the 2023-2024 school year, **high school students enrolled in the United States Government class required by s. [1003.4282\(3\)\(d\)](#) must receive at least 45 minutes of instruction on “Victims of Communism Day”** to include topics such as Mao Zedong and the Cultural Revolution, Joseph Stalin and the Soviet System, Fidel Castro and the Cuban Revolution, Vladimir Lenin and the Russian Revolution, Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge, and Nicolás Maduro and the Chavismo movement, and how victims suffered under these regimes through poverty, starvation, migration, systemic lethal violence, and suppression of speech.

Required Instruction s. 1003.42(1)(v)1.a-f., F.S.

Beginning in the 2026-2027 school year, the history of communism. Such instruction must be age appropriate and developmentally appropriate and include:

- The history of communism in the United States and domestic communist movements, including their histories and tactics.
- Atrocities committed in foreign countries under the guidance of communism.
- Comparative discussion of political ideologies, such as communism and totalitarianism, which conflict with the principles of freedom and democracy essential to the founding principles of the United States.
- The increasing threat of communism in the United States and to our allies through the 20th century, including the events of the Cultural Revolution in the People's Republic of China and other mass killings from communist regimes.
- The economic, industrial, and political events that have preceded and anticipated communist revolutions.
- The communist policies of Cuba and the spread of communist ideologies throughout Latin America, including the roots of the Communist Party of Cuba and guerrilla forces throughout Latin America.

History of Communism Benchmarks



- Political, economic and social structures of communist regimes
- Development of communism in Europe, Asia and the Americas
- International response to communism
- Impact on individual rights and democratic principles
- Human and societal consequences of these systems

History of Communism Benchmarks in Courses

Dedicated History of Communism Courses

- History of Communism I
- History of Communism II

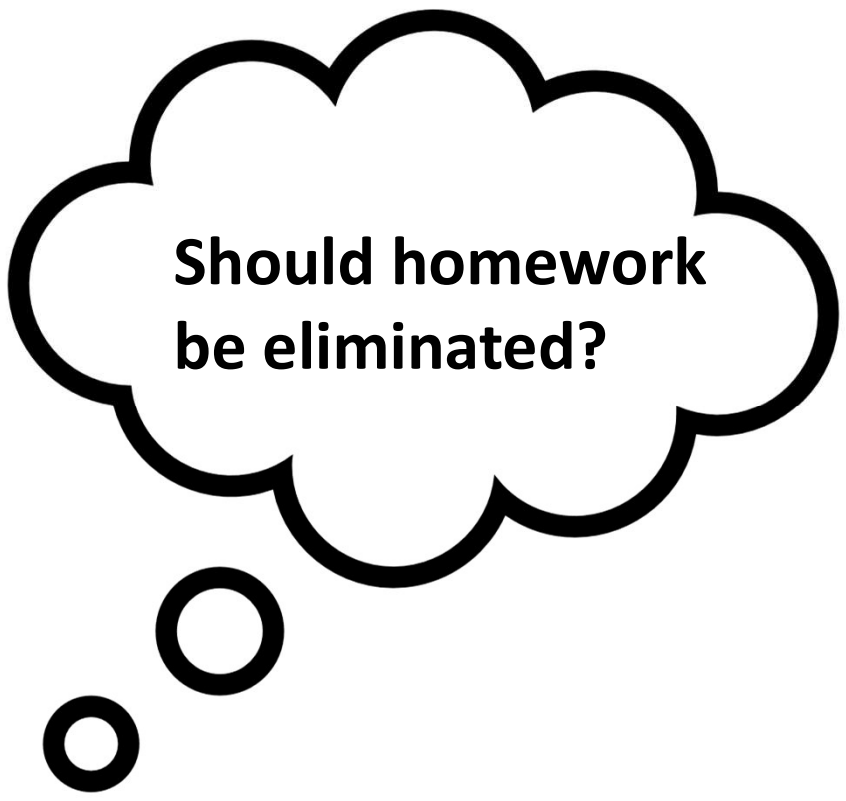
Sample of Courses with Select Benchmarks

- U.S. Government
- World History
- Personal Financial & Money Management
- International Relations
- Latin American History



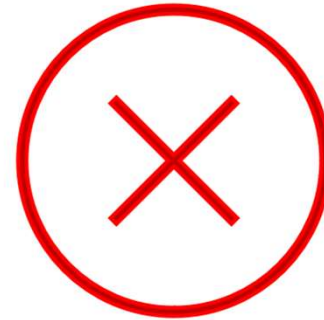
Structured Academic Controversy

Ponder This...



**Should homework
be eliminated?**

Should Homework Be Eliminated?



Turn to your shoulder partner and now argue the opposite of what you believe.

Structured Academic Controversy Introduction

- How does it feel to argue the other side?
- How might this shift student thinking?

This is the heart of Structured Academic Controversy – students engaging with ideas with which they may not initially agree, using structure to guide respectful, evidence-based thinking.

Structured Academic Controversy

- Structured Academic Controversy (SAC) is a student-centered discussion strategy in which learners explore a controversial or complex issue by:
 - examining multiple perspectives;
 - using evidence; and
 - working collaboratively to reach a deeper understanding.
- Rather than debating to “win,” students engage in purposeful dialogue to build critical thinking, understanding and evidence-based reasoning.

Structured Academic Controversy

- Promotes critical thinking and analysis.
- Encourages civil discourse and listening skills.
- Builds empathy by requiring students to consider opposing views.
- Reinforces use of evidence rather than opinion.
- Supports civic learning and democratic practices.

Primary Source Activity

- Using the primary and secondary sources in your envelope, plus the benchmarks listed below, what might be an essential question that students could debate?
- SS.912.CG.3.1 – Analyze how certain political ideologies conflict with the principles of freedom and democracy.
- SS.912.HC.11.1 – Discuss the value of individual rights and freedoms.
- SS.912.HC.4.5 – Analyze the key events, policies and experiences of life in the Soviet Union from 1922-1945.
- SS.912.HC.6.7 – Compare Cuba’s social, political and economic landscape before and after socialism.

Structured Academic Controversy

- Select a strong, debatable question
 - Multiple defensible perspectives
 - Grounded in content and benchmarks
 - Requires evidence to support claims

Which communist regime had the most significant negative impact on democratic principles?

Structured Academic Controversy

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Structured Academic Controversy

- Select balanced primary source documents
 - Provide 2-4 per perspectives.
 - Include primary and secondary sources.
 - Ensure sources are accessible but rigorous.
- Examples
 - Images
 - Speeches
 - Dissident accounts
 - Excerpts from books/memoirs

“In that same year the practice of arresting students began... for “criticism of the system” (not in public, merely in conversation amongst themselves).”

-Excerpt from *The Gulag Archipelago*,
Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn (SS.912.HC.4.11)

Structured Academic Controversy

- Organize students into groups
 - Groups of four
 - Divide into pairs within each group
 - Pair A=one perspective
 - Pair B=opposing perspective



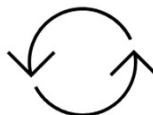
Structured Academic Controversy – Structured Supports

- What supports are you providing students to maintain the structure of the activity?
 - Thought organizers
 - Document reflection questions
 - Check-ins with teacher

Regime	Rights	Rule of Law	Political Participation	Government Control	Evidence
USSR					
China					
Cambodia					
Cuba					

Structured Academic Controversy

- Prepare Arguments:
 - Analyze sources.
 - Identify key claims.
 - Gather text-based evidence.
 - Utilize a graphic organizer/note catcher.
- Present initial arguments:
 - Pair A presents their position while pair B listens.
 - Pair B then paraphrases/summarized what they heard.
 - Switch roles and repeat.



Structured Academic Controversy

- Switch perspectives
 - Pairs then argue the opposite side.
 - This step builds a deeper understanding.
- Open discussion and consensus building
 - All 4 students discuss:
 - Points of agreement
 - Strongest evidence
 - Nuanced conclusions

Structured Academic Controversy

- Personal Reflection
 - Students write or respond to a personal reflection prompt:
 - How did your thinking change?
 - What evidence was most convincing?
 - Why is it important to consider multiple perspectives?



Reflection

- How can strategies such as Structured Academic Controversy support required instruction while promoting deeper student thinking and engagement?
- Across the social studies strands, where do natural tensions or competing perspectives exist within your content?

United States History Structured Academic Controversy Topic Example



Question: Did the New Deal expand democracy or overextend federal power?



Sources: Franklin D. Roosevelt speeches, Supreme Court cases, letters from citizens

Civics and Government Structured Academic Controversy Topic Example



Question: Does media strengthen or undermine democracy?



Sources: News excerpts, social media policies, founding documents on freedom of the press

Economics Structured Academic Controversy Topic Example



Question: Should governments intervene during economic crises?



Sources: Data from recessions, policy responses, expert commentary

World History Structured Academic Controversy Topic Example



Question: Do revolutions ultimately advance or destabilize societies?



Sources: Revolutionary writings, propaganda, firsthand accounts

Holocaust Education Structured Academic Controversy Topic Example



Question: To what extent are individuals responsible under oppressive regimes?



Sources: Diaries, testimonies, laws, trial records



Additional Support

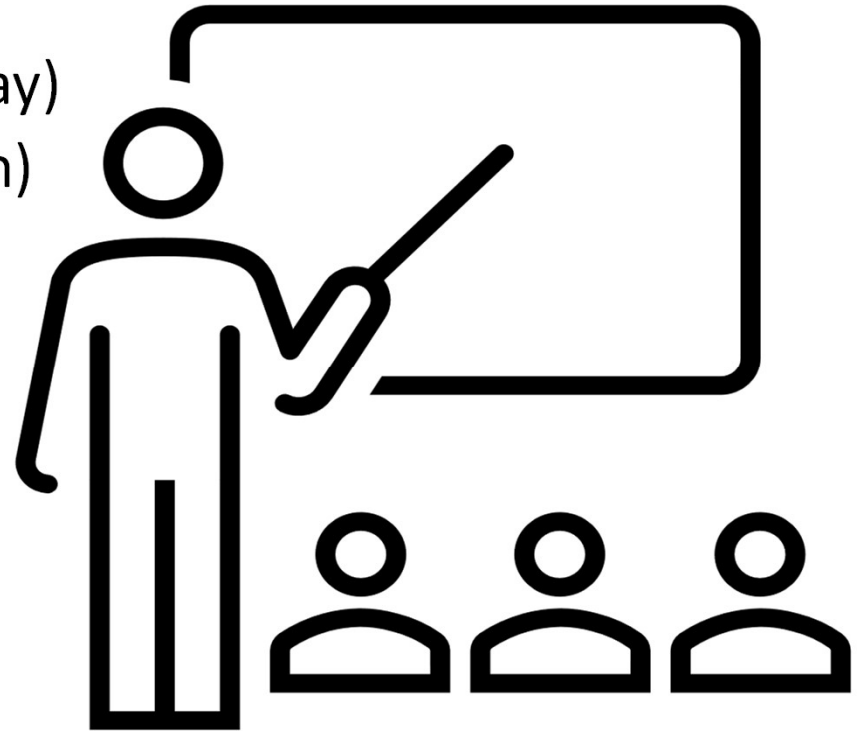
BSIS Summer Professional Learning 2026

Dates and Locations:

- June 15-18 – Panama City Beach (Bay)
- July 13-16 – Riverview (Hillsborough)
- July 20-23 – Ft. Myers (Lee)

Tracks:

- Leadership
- Math (K-2, 3-5, 6-8, 9-12)
- Various breakout sessions
- Expo



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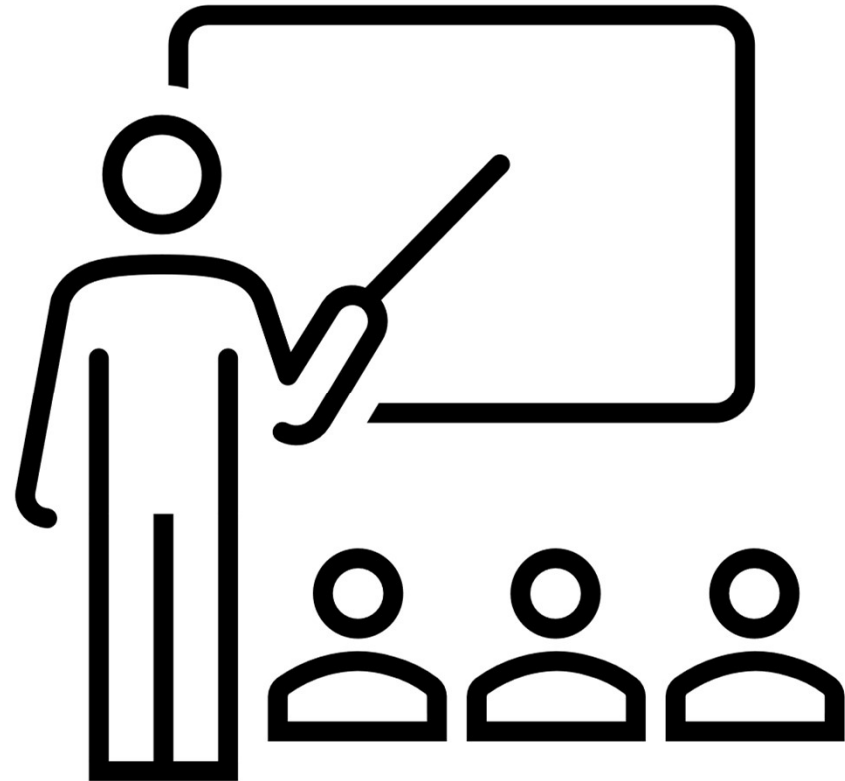
Civics Summer Professional Learning 2026

Dates and Locations:

- June 11 – Sarasota
- June 18 – Jacksonville
- July 9 – Orlando

Tracks:

- New to Civics (0-3 years)
- K-5
- 6-12



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