

October 29, 2007

Mrs. Kathleen N. Straus, President
State Board of Education
P.O. Box 30008
Lansing, MI 48909

Re: Draft K-12 Content Expectations for Social Studies

Dear Mrs. Straus:

I am pleased that the October 1st Board meeting produced a decision to adopt Grade Level Content Expectations that include post-statehood Michigan History in 4th grade. I commend the Board on this decision.

I write to urge the Board to include a specific part of the History of Michigan (Beyond Statehood) Content Expectations that address Michigan's contributions in the central event in U.S. history, the American Civil War.

The current text states, in pertinent part, regarding U.S. history: "Using the context of the United States, fourth grade students learn significant social studies concepts within an increasingly complex social environment."

I can think of nothing better to help students learn such "concepts" in "an increasingly complex environment" than using Michigan and the Civil War as the case study. From the Northwest Ordinance to the Underground Railroad to Michigan's support for anti-slavery platforms in the 1860 election, students can come to understand the great heritage of this State in support of freedom and equal rights for all Americans. Michigan had achieved Statehood only a quarter-century before this central event occurred; it was a period in history fraught with great issues and great uncertainty, like today. The War created opportunities for African-Americans to fight for freedom, for women to take up roles formerly held by men, and for people of all ethnicities in Michigan, including Native Americans, to contribute to saving their nation.

Such instruction will dovetail neatly with fieldtrips to the Capitol grounds and the Michigan Historical Center, where Civil War monuments and flags serve as 3D instructional tools.

I am aware that more detail will be provided on the Civil War and Reconstruction in grade 8. I write, however, to urge strongly that the Board set the stage for this later learning by deliberately instructing 4th graders on the historic role played by their State in the Civil War era.

Sincerely,