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TO: South Dakota Secretary of Education
South Dakota Board of Education Standards

CC: Rapid City Area School Board

DATE: February 7th, 2023

RE: Opposition to the Proposed Social Studies Education Standards

The Elevate Board of Directors would like to communicate our opposition to the Proposed Social Studies Education Standards that are currently in the public comment phase by the South Dakota Board of Education Standards, and strongly urge the Board to set aside adoption of the proposed standards at this time.

Elevate is the leading regional economic development organization serving Rapid City and the surrounding region. Our investors are business owners, taxpayers, parents, and grandparents who recognize that a quality public education is the foundation upon which our community and our region will thrive. Quality education is an integral component to support the upward mobility of our citizens; an important recruitment and retention consideration of businesses and professionals who seek to locate here; and critical to attracting and retaining qualified educators who positively benefit our school system.

We support a strong civics education in our schools that instills a sense of pride in our community, our state, and our nation and gives students the background and tools to participate fully in our nation's economy.

Our opposition to the proposed standards falls into four areas:

Standards Revision Process. We are disappointed that the 2021 social studies standards work product of the original South Dakota Standards Revision Commission appointed by Governor Noem was removed from consideration without justification or opportunity for public comment. The original Commission reflected a diverse mix of South Dakotans including several practicing educators who will be expected to implement the standards within their respective school districts.

Standards Content. The Proposed Standards are a complete departure from the prior without any apparent justification for doing so. Instead of providing schools with high level standards to guide curriculum, the Proposed Standards represent a voluminous set of specific topics that emphasize rote memorization rather than higher level critical thinking skills that will serve students throughout their lifetimes. The sheer volume of the Proposed Standards across all grade levels compared to the 2015 standards would overwhelm most classrooms and threaten time in other key instructional areas. To illustrate, the 2015 Kindergarten standards consist of 9 anchor standards, whereas the Proposed Kindergarten Standards include 127 topics. Local grade level experts feel the



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standards lack age and development level appropriateness, consistent with the numerous examples that have been shared during previous public input hearings.

Standards Implementation/Costs. The Proposed Standards represent an unfunded mandate for local school districts at a time when school funding and teacher recruitment is most challenging. While each 7-year standards process comes with some cost, this extreme departure from existing standards, without justification, will require a total revamp in teacher training, curriculum, and instructional materials that local school districts will be forced to assume. Rapid City Schools projects the costs to be more than three times what would otherwise be required for an update to support curriculum revamp with instructional materials and teacher training. Those funds would impact RCAS Capital Outlay fund. The \$800,000 in Governor Noem's proposed FY2024 budget is unrealistic and inadequate to assist school districts across the state with implementation. Additionally, the higher education system will need to address the way teachers are trained in South Dakota, which will require further budgetary consideration.

Workforce Recruitment. We are additionally concerned that these standards are out of sync with social studies standards in the surrounding states, which will make transitioning students into our school system challenging. This will impact our recruitment of skilled and professional employees to the state.

We support the goal of a quality civics education, but we remain skeptical that the Proposed Social Studies Standards will achieve that objective and instead will result in unintended consequences detrimental to our school system. The Proposed Standards and the process used to push them forward represents a poor precedent for future standards review that must be addressed, or we will jeopardize our ability attract and retain quality teaching professionals and administrators to the state.

We encourage the Board to take into consideration public comments received thus far and set aside the Proposed Standards. We respectfully request the Board engage a broad spectrum of South Dakota teaching professionals to develop a revised proposal that better considers the above concerns.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tom Johnson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Tom Johnson,
CEO & President, Elevate Rapid City