



River Trails

SCHOOL DISTRICT 26

To: River Trails Board of Education

From: Kristine Seifert - Assistant Superintendent Teaching & Learning

Date: March 10, 2026

Subject: River Trails Middle School Social Studies Curriculum Review and Adoption Recommendation

Introduction

The purpose of this memo is to provide an update on the middle school social studies curriculum audit and to present a formal recommendation for new instructional materials based on this comprehensive review. This recommendation supports our ongoing commitment to ensuring high-quality, equitable social studies instruction that aligns with the Illinois Learning Standards for Social Science and reflects current best practices in inquiry-based learning, historical thinking, and civic engagement.

Recommendation

I recommend the district adopt *History Alive!* (TCI) for a three-year term beginning in the 2026-27 school year. This recommendation is based on pilot feedback, comprehensive evaluation, and alignment with district priorities. Teacher feedback from the pilot and evaluation process highlighted several strengths of *History Alive!*:

- Engaging, interactive learning experiences that deepen students' understanding of historical events and perspectives
- Accessible student text available in multiple languages and reading levels with embedded support tools
- Integration of primary sources to strengthen historical thinking and evidence-based analysis
- Opportunities to integrate reading and writing within social studies instruction
- Collaborative structures that promote student dialogue and perspective-taking

These features support rigorous, engaging instruction while providing equitable access for all learners.

Background

The middle school social studies team began the curriculum audit in fall 2025 to review the district's current materials, *Holt/McDougal*, adopted in 2014. The review confirmed several strengths, including comprehensive content, clear unit pacing, vocabulary supports, and teacher resources that help build background knowledge.

However, the materials have become dated and increasingly difficult to access. Much of the digital platform has expired, leaving limited online functionality and requiring teachers to rely primarily on print and legacy materials. The program also provides limited opportunities for structured inquiry, primary source analysis, and student-centered investigation aligned with current social science standards as standards have been revised in recent years.

The audit concluded that updated materials are needed to better support inquiry-based learning, accessible digital resources, and engaging instructional tools that reflect current best practices in middle school social studies instruction.

Following the audit timeline, a team of RTMS teachers:

- Identified program priorities
- Reviewed and narrowed publisher options

- Piloted materials across grade levels
- Evaluated programs using the established criteria

Analysis of Options

The audit committee evaluated multiple curriculum options, but *History Alive!* most effectively addressed the areas of growth identified through the needs assessment for grades 6–8. The program provides an engaging, inquiry-driven approach that actively involves students in exploring historical questions and perspectives through primary sources, interactive activities, and collaborative discussion. Teachers also noted strong integration of literacy through structured opportunities for reading, writing, and analysis within social studies.

A key strength of *History Alive!* is the flexibility it provides through both digital and print access to materials. Students can interact with multimedia resources such as maps, videos, and simulations through the digital platform, while also having access to a printed text for reading, annotation, and reference. This dual-access model was not available in other programs reviewed and was viewed by the team as an important way to support diverse learning preferences and ensure reliable access to instructional materials.

Financial Impact

The total cost of adoption is **\$43,487.70**. This includes:

- 2 class sets of 30 textbooks per grade level
- 2 sets of print teacher materials per grade level
- Online access for 4 teachers per grade level
- Full online access for students and staff for 3 years
- First-year professional development

This cost will be covered by the curriculum and instructional materials adoption budget for the 2025–26 and 2026–27 school years.

Timeline and Next Steps

Pending Board approval purchase orders will be submitted. Professional development for staff will begin as early as April 2026 and continue into summer and fall.

Attachments

- [Quote](#)