

TEACHING THE TRUTH ABOUT SOCIALISM IN AMERICA'S PUBLIC SCHOOLS

By Chris Talgo

Key Takeaways

- America's public schools are failing to teach students basic civics and U.S. history.
- In recent years, young Americans' support for socialism has skyrocketed.
- Most young Americans favor socialism but cannot define what the term means.
- Last year, democratic socialists Zohran Mamdani and Katie Wilson received nearly 80 percent of youth votes in New York City and Seattle.
- State standards on socialism instruction need to be updated so that students receive the truth about socialism.

Civics and History Education in America Is Abysmal

In the United States, nearly 50 million students, about 90 percent of total K-12 student enrollment, annually attend public schools.¹ The National Assessment of Educational Progress, commonly called the Nation's Report Card, reported that, "In 2022, the average civics score at eighth grade decreased by 2 points compared to 2018." This was a significant development because it marked the first-ever decline in the average score since the test was launched in 1998.²

Student test scores in the U.S. history assessment have also dropped in recent years. "In 2022, the average U.S. history score at eighth grade decreased by 5 points compared to 2018 and by 9 points compared to 2014." In 2022, the average score on the U.S. history assessment dropped to 258, the lowest score ever recorded in the 28-year period of the test.³

Young Americans Want Socialism

As student test scores in civics and U.S. history have declined, young Americans' support for

1 National Center for Education Statistics, "Fast Facts," accessed February 2, 2026, <https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=372>

2 The Nation's Report Card, "NAEP Report Card: 2022 NAEP Civics Assessment," accessed February 2, 2026, <https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/highlights/civics/2022/>

3 The Nation's Report Card, "NAEP Report Card: 2022 U.S. History Assessment," accessed February 2, 2026, <https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/highlights/ushistory/2022/>

socialism has increased substantially. According to a 2020 YouGov poll, “Socialist sentiment is increasing among younger generations with Gen Z’s favorability at 49%, up from 40% in 2019.” The poll also found that “31% of Gen Z and 35% of Millennials support the gradual elimination of the capitalist system in favor of a more socialist system;” “18% of Gen Z and 13% of Millennials think communism is a fairer system than capitalism and deserves consideration in America;” and “30% of Gen Z has a favorable view of Marxism, up 6% from 2019.”⁴

More recent polls and election results confirm the fact that young Americans favor socialism in the United States. A 2025 Cato Institute poll found that “62 percent of Americans aged 18–29 say they hold a ‘favorable view’ of socialism, and 34 percent say the same of communism.”⁵ A series of polls conducted by The Heartland Institute and Rasmussen Reports in late 2025 showed similar results. Nearly 60 percent of likely voters aged 18 to 24 want a democratic socialist in the White House in 2028 and 58 percent of likely voters aged 18 to 39 “support government-run grocery stores in every town in America,” including more than half of conservatives (53%) and moderates (53%).⁶

In November 2025, democratic socialist mayoral candidates, Zohran Mamdani in New York City and Katie Wilson in Seattle, received overwhelming support from young voters, proving that young Americans indeed will vote for socialism. Specifically, “75% of the Gen Z and Millennial voters in Seattle chose Wilson, and 78% of young voters in New York City chose Mamdani.”⁷

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Young Americans Cannot Even Define Socialism

While young Americans are more inclined than ever to support socialism, other polls show that many do not understand what socialism is. In 2019, Young America’s Foundation released a poll showing that more than half of students cannot accurately define the term socialism. The poll, which included more than 2,000 students aged 13 to 22, found 27 percent “unsure/don’t know” the meaning of the word “socialism” whereas 10 percent best described socialism as “being social.”⁸

A more recent survey, taken in 2023, shows that less than a third of young Americans properly

defined socialism as “government taking control of companies and industries such that the state—not individuals and entrepreneurs—control the

⁴ Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation, “Fifth Annual Report on U.S. Attitudes Toward Socialism, Communism, and Collectivism,” accessed February 2, 2026, <https://victims of communism.org/annual-poll/2020-annual-poll/>

⁵ Michael Chapman, “Young Americans Like Socialism Too Much—That’s a Problem Libertarians Must Fix,” Cato Institute, May 15, 2025, <https://www.cato.org/blog/young-americans-socialism-too-much-thats-problem-libertarians-must-fix>

⁶ The Heartland Institute, “Heartland/Rasmussen Poll: 52% of Young Voters Have Favorable Impression of Democratic Socialist Zohran Mamdani,” November 13, 2025, <https://heartland.org/opinion/heartland-rasmussen-poll-52-of-young-voters-have-favorable-impression-of-democratic-socialist-zohran-mamdani/>

⁷ Saraphena Wong, “A Tale of Two Mayors: How Zohran Mamdani and Katie Wilson Appealed to Younger Voters,” The Fulcrum, December 4, 2025, <https://thefulcrum.us/elections/mamdani-wilson-young-voter-appeal>

⁸ Young America’s Foundation, “What Is Socialism? More Than Half of Students Can’t Accurately Define It,” August 18, 2019, <https://yaf.org/news/new-yaf-poll-what-is-socialism-more-than-half-of-students-cant-accurately-define-it/>

economy." On the other hand, 66 percent of young Americans aged 18 to 24 defined socialism as "the government providing more services."⁹

Social Studies Standards Gone Wild

Although each state crafts its own specific social studies standards, which will be examined in further detail below, organizations like the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) exert influence. In 2017, the NCSS updated its National Standards for the Preparation of Social Studies Teachers to "take informed action toward achieving a more inclusive and equitable society" and "take informed action that challenges the effects of injustice in schools, community, or society."¹⁰

Moreover, the Education Resource Information Center, under the Department of Education, notes that a "textbook analysis regarding the presentation of socialism in four leading high school social studies books...indicate that students relying on these texts to gain understanding of socialism and contemporary expressions of socialist ideas in modern societies will be invariably shortchanged. In most of the books, students are not encouraged to analyze or evaluate socialism."¹¹

Per the Constitution, states, not the federal

government, make most of the decisions regarding education content. Although the NCSS has issued national curriculum standards since 1994, these remain voluntary. Essentially, every state drafts its own set of curriculum standards.

As can be expected, state-based social studies standards vary. Some states have dense binders detailing exactly what students must learn whereas others have loose requirements that stipulate subjects to be covered with wide discretion.

While both approaches have their pluses and minuses, the latter has led to an environment in which social studies teachers can present topics like socialism in a very misleading manner to their students.

To combat teachers from misrepresenting a topic as serious as socialism, states can update their social studies standards to ensure that students receive the truth about socialism.

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The Florida Model

In April 2024, Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis signed a bill to "ensure students in Florida are taught the truth about the evils and dangers of Communism."¹²

In November 2025, the Florida Board of Education

9 Jason Clemens and Steven Globerman, "Young Americans support abstract and unworkable socialism," Fraser Institute, March 3, 2023, <https://www.fraserinstitute.org/commentary/young-americans-support-abstract-and-unworkable-socialism>

10 National Council for the Social Studies, "National Standards for the Preparation of Social Studies Teachers," January 1, 2018, <https://www.socialstudies.org/standards/national-standards-preparation-social-studies-teachers>

11 Education Resource Information Center, Richard Neumann, "Socialism in High School Social Studies Textbooks," December 26, 2011, <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ950507>

12 Executive office of the governor, "Governor DeSantis Signs Legislation Further Enhancing Florida's Education Standards on the Evils of Communism," April 17, 2024, <https://www.flgov.com/eog/news/press/2024/governor-desantis-signs-legislation-further-enhancing-floridas-education-standards>

approved¹³ “new History of Communism standards” to equip “students with a truthful, in-depth understanding of how communist ideologies suppress individual freedoms, abuse power, and inflict widespread suffering.”

“With the resurgence of communist ideologies across the United States and throughout the world, it is more important than ever for students to understand the catastrophic failures and human suffering caused by communist regimes,” Commissioner of Education Anastasios Kamoutsas said.

“Florida’s new History of Communism standards will ensure that students learn the truth about the brutal

realities of life under communism and gain a deeper appreciation for the blessings of liberty that define our nation,” he added.

The point is that this is neither a red state nor blue state issue; it is a problem that exists in public schools across America.

Some may consider a law like this superfluous, but it is not. Less than a decade ago, I taught social studies courses in public schools in Illinois and South Carolina. Although I was less than surprised to observe my teaching colleagues in Illinois being sympathetic to socialism, it was concerning to see that the same basic dynamic existed in public school social studies departments in South Carolina. The point is that this is neither a red

state nor blue state issue; it is a problem that exists in public schools across America.

¹³ Florida Department of Education, “State Board of Education Approves New History of Communism Standards,” November 13, 2025, <https://www.fl DOE.org/newsroom/latest-news/state-board-of-education-approves-new-history-of-communism-standards-.shtml>