

How Garland ISD built background knowledge with Newsela Social Studies to bring lessons to life for all learners

DISTRICT PROFILE

District

GARLAND ISD

Location

GARLAND, TX

Student Population

52,300

Classroom Use Case

BUILD BACKGROUND
KNOWLEDGE

THE CHALLENGE

The district needed to support a new state-specific social studies course with resources that were accessible and aligned to standards.

Garland ISD is a large, diverse K-12 district in Texas with emergent bilingual students representing over a third of the student population. The district also offers a Spanish bilingual program in over half of its schools, where students spend half the week in classes taught in English, and the other half learning in Spanish.



When John Hatch, Social Studies Coordinator, set out with his team to design new ethnic studies courses for the district in alignment with a new [state initiative](#), he was struggling to find content that provided the depth and context necessary to support the curricula. Traditional providers simply didn't have the resources, and what resources were available weren't accessible to all students. "What we really lacked were good resources to supplement our Mexican American Studies course," shared Mr. Hatch.

Delivering social studies lessons that sparked student interest and were accessible to all learners—in Spanish and English—was a challenge. Making the lessons feel relevant to their lives was a must. The district needed a social studies resource that could provide students with knowledge on the variety of topics covered in social studies, including local histories, across grade levels. The resource needed to meet students where they were, build understanding on a diverse range of topics and perspectives, and cultivate students' desire to investigate and learn.

THE PLAN

Build social studies knowledge and bridge the gap between history and today with engaging, leveled content and flexible activities.

Garland purchased Newsela Social Studies to ensure all social studies teachers had access to a library of over 15,000 texts that were engaging, aligned to state standards, and available at five reading levels, with many texts published in leveled Spanish versions. Mr. Hatch and his team built Newsela Social Studies texts into the social studies curriculum at all grade levels to drive teacher adoption. Linking the content and activities to the curriculum made it easy for teachers to drop the content into their lesson plans confidently and know it would align with their unit.



Garland then worked with Newsela's team to design a resource for the high school Mexican American Studies course. Mr. Hatch partnered with Newsela's curricular specialists to curate a collection of content and activities that directly aligned with the course's curriculum. Texts covered everything from Mesoamerican civilizations to the Chicano identity to immigration, with DBQs and performance tasks for each unit to ensure students were practicing their social studies skills. The resource is now [available to any district as an add-on](#) to Newsela Social Studies.



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John Hatch
SOCIAL STUDIES COORDINATOR

During the rollout, Mr. Hatch showed social studies teachers how the leveled texts and Spanish translations still retained the key information at every reading level. His team also helped teachers use Newsela texts to build background knowledge through crucial reading and writing exercises. “We’re working hard with teachers to develop an intentional reading component and tie that with a writing component,” shared Mr. Hatch. “The resources in Newsela Social Studies lend themselves to that. Teachers could go through a whole cycle of reading and writing, in one or two class periods, and do that effectively.”

THE IMPACT

Students drew real-world connections to lessons and built background knowledge to empower deeper learning.

When Mr. Hatch and his team began showing teachers what Newsela Social Studies offered, the educators couldn’t wait to start using it in their classrooms. “Our teachers are loving it, and they’re using it all the time,” said Mr. Hatch. “The feedback I’ve gotten from teachers is that the articles are very accessible to the students, but they’re also pushing students forward—they’re not too easy. In social studies, and also in life, we need to have background knowledge. I think these types of articles give students the opportunity to develop that background knowledge and apply it. It really levels the playing field and drives interest on their part.”



Social studies teachers also used Newsela Social Studies content to contextualize new units for their students. “They pull resources that are timely and aligned to what they’re teaching. They can find resources about recent events, but also the historical context of those events,” shared Mr. Hatch.

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For example, when Garland’s sixth-grade social studies teachers were preparing a unit on Russia, they wanted to help students understand how history impacted today. “We realized a really relevant segue for students into that unit would be the war in Ukraine,” said Mr. Hatch. “Working with my curriculum writing team, we found not only recent articles on Newsela Social Studies that dealt with this conflict, but also historical content over the last decade that explores the growing conflict in Ukraine.”



Bringing accessible, fresh content to lessons that enable students to build background knowledge on the topic opens up learning for them. Teachers can easily map content to their units that provides the context students need to participate and grow their skills. And with the success Garland saw with Newsela Social Studies, the district purchased Newsela ELA to further expand and deepen the learning opportunities for all subjects. Learn more about [Garland’s success with Newsela ELA](#).

LESSONS LEARNED

- Support teacher adoption by showing them how the materials **align to their scope and sequence**.
- Level the playing field with content that **builds background knowledge on grade-level concepts** while meeting students where they are.
- Engage students with locally relevant, accessible content that **connects history to the present day**.

Expect more from your social studies content



COMPREHENSIVE

Cover endless curricular and high-interest topics with a variety of ways for students to show learning.



RELEVANT

Create authentic learning experiences with materials that respond to the real world and students’ lived experiences.



DIFFERENTIATED

Respond to each student’s needs with scaffolding support for whole-class, small-group, and individual instruction.



SKILL BUILDING

Provide opportunities to practice key skills & critical thinking with content-rich materials rooted in learning science.



Go to newsela.com to learn how you can enhance your curriculum materials today!