



STATE OF MICHIGAN
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
LANSING



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GOVERNOR

THOMAS D. WATKINS, JR.
SUPERINTENDENT OF
PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

TO: Members of the State Board of Education

FROM: Tom Watkins, Superintendent

DATE: September 29, 2004

SUBJ: REPORT OF SOCIAL STUDIES TASK FORCE

The Social Studies Task Force commissioned by the State Board of Education has completed its study, which included six public forums held throughout the state.

As a result of several days of meetings to consider and discuss the results of the hearings and its own study, the task force has developed recommendations and will be presenting these for consideration at the October 12 State Board of Education meeting.

Department staff will need an opportunity to study the recommendations in more detail and determine potential action steps to implement whatever recommendations the State Board approves.

It is recommended that the State Board of Education accept, with thanks, the report of the Social Studies Task Force and commission the superintendent and Department staff to study the report and return with the Department's recommendations for implementation.

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**Final Report of the
Task Force on Social Studies Assessment
to the
Michigan Department of Education
August 31, 2004**

**Chairmen: Honorable Doug Hart and
Dr. Joseph P. Stoltman**

Introduction

The Task Force on Social Studies was appointed by the State Board of Education to examine the performance of Michigan's 5th, 8th, and 11th grade students on the Social Studies MEAP. While steady progress has been made in Social Studies performance over the last five years, the percentage of students achieving scores at the proficient level and higher on the MEAP assessment remains problematic. The underlying reasons for how students performed were often explained with conflicting information. Teachers believed that students were performing at a higher level than reflected by the MEAP scores in social studies.

The Task Force on Social Studies initiated its deliberations by setting aside preconceived ideas about performance levels on the MEAP. The Task Force was committed to basing their recommendations to the greatest extent possible on data obtained from the past MEAP tests and from the public comments made by individuals attending the six public forums and those who submitted written comments to the Task Force. Members were focused on the objective review of student performance based on the expectations presented in the Michigan Curriculum Framework for Social Studies.

Two missions were assigned to the Task Force by the State Board of Education.

The *first mission* was to study student performance on the Social Studies MEAP. In addressing the first mission, the Task Force identified and carried out two tasks.

The first task was to examine the assessment and the performance by students on the Social Studies MEAP. This entailed reviewing geographic and socio-economic patterns of student performance, the performance scores necessary for students to demonstrate content proficiency, and comparison of social studies performance to other MEAP content areas.

The second task was to hold public forums during which teachers, administrators, parents, and other interested citizens were able to reflect on the Social Studies MEAP.

The *second mission* was to make recommendations to the State Board of Education and the Superintendent of Public Instruction regarding student performance on the Social Studies MEAP.

Charge to the Task Force as Presented by the Michigan Department of Education

The Issue

Over the course of the past five years, students at the elementary, middle and high school levels have not been reaching high achievement, as measured by the social studies MEAP tests. Although student achievement has been increasing slightly over the years, the MEAP results for 2004 still indicate over 70% of elementary and middle school students are not yet proficient, (“passing” the MEAP). High school results for 2004 indicate that 65% of high school students are not yet proficient.

The Mission of the Task Force

1. To study the issue of student performance on the Social Studies MEAP test.
2. To make recommendations to the Superintendent of Public Instruction on steps that need to be taken to improve student performance.

Timeline

The Task Force is asked to submit its final recommendations to the Superintendent by August 31, 2004.

The Task Force on Social Studies Assessment

Chairmen

Honorable Doug Hart, Representative, Michigan State House of Representatives
Dr. Joseph P. Stoltman, Professor, Western Michigan University

Members

Dr. Kathy Agard, Executive Director, Learning to Give
Dr. Judith Dorsch Backes, Representative, Michigan Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, Macomb Intermediate School District
Mrs. Amy Bloom, Consultant, Oakland Schools
Mr. Kyle Caldwell, Executive Director, CONNECT Michigan
Mr. James Cameron, Executive Director, Michigan Council for History Education, Saline High School
Dr. David Dieterle, President and Chief Academic Officer, Michigan Council on Economic Education
Mr. Rodger Epp, Science Consultant, MEAP Unit, Office of Educational Assessment and Accountability, Michigan Department of Education
Dr. Michael Libbee, Co-Coordinator, Michigan Geographic Alliance and Professor of Geography, Central Michigan University
Mr. Vince Meldrum, Representative, Michigan Civic Coalition, Earth Force
Mrs. Lawanda Parker, Teacher, Eisenhower High School, Utica Public Schools
Mr. Jim Petrie, Board Member, Wayne County RESA
Mrs. Mary Pumford, Teacher, Newaygo High School
Mr. Eric Rader, Policy Analyst, Office of the Governor
Dr. Michael Radke, Supervisor, MEAP Unit, Office of Educational Assessment and Accountability, Michigan Department of Education

Mr. Kevin Richard, Science Consultant, Office of School Improvement,
Michigan Department of Education
Ms. Dahia Shabaka, Director of Social Studies, Detroit Public Schools
Mr. Roy Sovis, Chair, Michigan Social Studies Supervisors Association,
Genesee Intermediate School District
Ms. Linda Start, Executive Director, Michigan Center for Civic Education
Mrs. Kathleen Straus, President, Michigan State Board of Education
Ms. J. Kelli Sweet, Executive Director, Michigan Council for the Social Studies
Mrs. Karen R. Todorov, Social Studies Consultant, Office of School Improvement,
Michigan Department of Education
Honorable Michael Warren, Jr., Judge, Oakland County Circuit Court
Mrs. Beth Washington, Teacher, West Ottawa Public Schools
Mr. Tom Yaeger, Teacher, Ann Arbor Public Schools

Secretary to the Task Force

Ms. Carol Hebert, Secretary, Office of School Improvement, Michigan Department
Of Education

Procedures and Goals Adopted by the Task Force

Goals

1. Hold a series of public hearings to obtain observations of teachers and other individuals regarding the Social Studies MEAP and the future improvement of student performance.
2. Review scores on the Social Studies MEAP over the past five years and identify any trends that may suggest necessary action or further study.
3. Compare the Social Studies MEAP with MEAP science and reading performance over the past several years to analyze concurrent issues.
4. Discuss and formulate recommendations based on information gained through public hearings and the analysis of the Social Studies MEAP scores that are consistent with improving student performance.

Outcomes

1. The Social Studies Task Force will identify and articulate a specific set of content and process issues with the Social Studies MEAP at each of the levels where it is administered.
2. The Social Studies Task Force will formulate a set of recommendations and suggested follow-up actions directed to the State Board of Education and Superintendent of Public Instruction for the improvement of student achievement in social studies.

Document to Present

A list of recommendations regarding the Social Studies MEAP based on the deliberations, public hearings and fact finding presented to the State Board of Education and Superintendent of Public Instruction by the Social Studies Task Force

Public Forum Schedule

The task force began taking public comment at six regional locations beginning July 9, 2004.

Task Force on Social Studies Assessment Public Forum Schedule

July 9 Wayne RESA	9-11:30 a.m.	3500 Van Born Road, Wayne, MI Room 223 2 nd Floor Simmons Education Building
Saginaw ISD	1:30-4:00 p.m.	6235 Gratiot Road, Saginaw, MI
July 22 Kent ISD	1:00-3:30 p.m.	2930 Knapp Street, NE, Grand Rapids, MI
July 23 Lenawee ISD	9:30-12:00 p.m.	4107 N. Adrian Highway, Adrian, MI
July 26 Charlevoix-Emmet ISD	1:00-3:30 p.m.	8568 Mercer Blvd., Charlevoix, MI
July 27 Marquette-Alger RESA	1:00-3:30 p.m.	321 E. Ohio, Marquette, MI

Introduction to the Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on the data presented by the Office of Educational Assessment and Accountability, the six public forums, and correspondence with the Task Force.

The tone of the six public forums was consistently positive and professional. Despite a summer announcement of the forums and the locations, each of the six sessions was crowded, largely with teachers and other educators. A total of 209 people attended the meetings and a large number of written and electronic responses were sent. The public comments were professional, often detailed and data based, constructive, and overwhelming positive about both the Michigan social studies framework and about MEAP. Virtually no teacher said anything such as “eliminate the MEAP in social studies” and many said content standards and MEAP helped improve the quality of social studies instruction at their schools. The comments during the forums were consistently about how to improve student achievement and MEAP.

The Task Force identified substantial uncertainty over the actual achievement levels of Michigan students on the social studies MEAP based on public comment and data. Due to budget constraints in 2002, the MEAP tests were shortened. Five constructed response questions worth a total of 10 points and one extended response question worth five points were eliminated from the Social Studies MEAP Test. Furthermore, in 2003 five additional multiple-choice questions were added. In light of these changes and the evolution of the test since 1999, it is appropriate to revisit the cut scores for the Social Studies MEAP Tests.

In addition to problems with reporting achievement levels, educators reported the lack of time, money, support and the sheer number of benchmarks as major problems regarding successful teaching and learning in social studies. The absence of social studies as part of the MERIT scholarship award was frequently mentioned as a major reason students lacked motivation to do well on the social studies MEAP in high school.

The Task Force was committed to basing recommendations to the greatest extent possible on data from the past MEAP tests and from the public and submitted comments.

Recommendations and Rationale of the Task Force on Social Studies Assessment

1 Social studies will be included in the Merit scholarship.

Based on the data and the oral and written comments provided to the task force there was a concern about:

- The lack of motivation of students taking the social studies portion of the MEAP because results of the social studies MEAP are not part of the Merit scholarship.
 - Some people reported that the information provided regarding the relative lack of importance assigned to the social studies MEAP High School Test decreased the motivation of students taking it.
 - The numbers of students who do not take or complete the MEAP HST for Social studies is of concern to teachers and administrators.
 - Social studies being seen as a “stepchild to other subjects”.
 - The negative affect of “pitting one subject against another” for importance in the curriculum.
2. The Michigan Department of Education conducts the process to establish appropriate MEAP test cut scores for elementary, middle, and high school social studies. The department will also review the last five years of social studies data and report back to the Superintendent of Public Instruction on the accuracy of the reporting of student achievement.

Based on the data and the oral and written comments provided to the Task Force, the rationale for the recommendation is:

- Some people perceive that the social studies test is too hard to pass.
- Teachers are working hard but the test results appear not to reflect their work.
- There was concern that the “cut scores” are too rigorous.
- Social studies performance expectations are perceived by teachers, students, and parents as too difficult.
- The Social studies MEAP test design was changed twice in the past five years due to budget constraints without corresponding changes to the cut scores.
- The MEAP social studies cut scores have been maintained by equating to the original cut scores since 1999.
- Concern was expressed that the cut scores equated to the original performance standard in 1999 may not have maintained the same level of difficulty as the test changed in content over time.
- Examples of student social studies MEAP results raised concern that students were reported as not meeting state social studies standards while educators believed the students were actually performing at or above the standards on the MEAP and in the classroom.
- Analysis of MEAP results showed the following:
 - a. The number and percent of total points needed to meet state social studies standards is greater than that needed for other subjects.
 - b. The percent of students meeting the state standards in social studies for the past five years is substantially less than that of other subjects. This contrasts with reports of educators about significant improvements in student social studies knowledge and skills over this same time frame.

- c. Over the past five years, fifth grade social studies MEAP scores show a gradual upward trend; eighth grade social studies MEAP scores show relatively level performance; and high school graduating class social studies MEAP scores show a recent upward trend.

3. The Michigan Department of Education completes the development of *Grade Level Content Expectations for Social Studies*.

Based on the data and the oral and written comments provided to the Task Force the rationale for the recommendation is:

- There is a need for Grade Level Content Expectations for Social Studies.
- Items, contexts, and process thinking requirements for test questions are perceived as developmentally inappropriate.
- The number of benchmarks available for testing is too large.
- The possible variety of contexts for testing benchmarks is too great.
- The social studies test is constantly changing because of the large number of benchmarks.
- Teachers need a steady target.

4. In consultation with ISD's, local school districts, public school academies, and professional organizations, the Michigan Department of Education develops and implements a comprehensive *communication plan* for reaching all teachers of social studies and their administrators with information about assessment and instruction, and availability of resources for teaching the social studies curriculum framework upon which the MEAP is built.

Based on the data and the oral and written comments provided to the Task Force the rationale for the recommendation is:

- A lack of understanding about how the MEAP tests are constructed, reviewed and performance levels set for scoring.
- Some teachers perceive that there is a lack of social studies resources.
- Changes in the MEAP test are not communicated regularly to teachers.
- A lack of teacher-to-teacher communication.
- The lack of a proactive and predictable process for vetting concerns about statewide testing.
- A general lack of understanding about what MEAP scores mean.
- A lack of understanding of how to use demographic and test data to improve instruction.
- Lack of communication about the importance of social studies disciplines.
- A need for better social studies resources demands better communication about available resources.

The communication plan should include but not be limited to:

- a. Availability of resources for teaching social studies.
 - b. Changes in MEAP testing.
 - c. A plan for initiating teacher-to-teacher communication for the purposes of information sharing about the social studies.
 - d. Forum for communicating concerns with MEAP testing.
 - e. Methods of communicating information about students moving from the basic to apprentice categories as also being important indicators of student achievement.
 - f. Methods of accurately communicating MEAP results at the local and public school academy level in a manner which parents, teachers, students, and the media can understand for the purpose of improving student achievement.
5. In conjunction with the ISD's, local school districts, public school academies, professional organizations, and universities, the Michigan Department of Education develops, facilitates funding, and monitors the implementation of a professional development plan for all administrators and teachers of social studies statewide.

Based on the data and the oral and written comments provided to the Task Force, the rationale for the recommendation is:

- The lack of a uniform understanding of social studies vocabulary.
- The need for integration strategies in the elementary grades with reading, mathematics, and science.
- Lack of understanding about how the social studies content disciplines are connected with one another.
- Problems associated with understanding data regarding MEAP results at the local level.
- Lack of understanding how demographic data and test results are used.
- Lack of enough time to teach social studies.
- Reading and mathematics focus because of No Child Left Behind requires integration materials and practices that are not now available.
- Problems for teachers in schools that do not have aligned curricula.
- Lack of resources available to update teacher knowledge about history, geography, economics, and political science.
- Demographic analysis of social studies MEAP scores showed the following:
 - a. The percent of students meeting state standards in urban, rural, small community, and suburban districts are relatively parallel to the statewide student performance. Urban students show the greatest need for growth in social studies performance.
 - b. The percent of students meeting state social studies standards differs by ethnicity. Students identified as Black-not of Hispanic origin, Hispanic, and American Indian or Alaskan Native show the greatest need for growth in social studies performance.

- c. The percent of students meeting state social studies standards is also lower for students identified as economically disadvantaged, special education, limited English proficient, migrant, homeless, and in the school for less than a full academic year.
- d. The limited English proficient students' performance on the MEAP social studies is in contrast to that of students identified as "formerly" limited English proficient. The later is reported as meeting state standards in social studies at nearly the same percent as all students statewide.

The professional development plan will include but not be limited to:

- Social studies vocabulary acquisition and application.
- Integration strategies with reading, mathematics, and science K-8.
- Support for the development of content knowledge and instructional practices of teachers in civics, history, geography, economics, inquiry and decision-making.
- Alignment of local curricula with the Curriculum Framework for Social Studies.
- Techniques for integrating the social studies discipline K-12.
- Methods for interpreting MEAP results to provide constructive feedback at the local school level.
- How to use the demographic data derived from MEAP results to impact instruction and student achievement.

6. Whenever changes are made to the MEAP, the design of the tests will follow the Policy on Learning Expectations as approved by the State Board of Education for Michigan students.

Based on the advice of the Task Force, the following recommendations are made:

- Keep the social studies MEAP consistent with current policy.
- Maintain the integrity of the original test design, because the use of only multiple-choice questions to authentically assess higher order thinking is restrictive.

7. Pursuant to the SBE Policy on Learning Expectations for Michigan Students, the Task Force recommends that the inquiry and persuasive essay questions remain in the Social Studies MEAP Test, and that the MEAP office explore ways to weight those strands more equally with the four disciplinary strands, as recommended in the original MEAP Assessment Plan.

Based on the data and the oral and written comments, the Task Force supports:

- Keeping the social studies MEAP consistent with current policy.
- Maintaining the integrity of the original test design.

8. The Michigan Department of Education makes available to the public an annotated list of the social studies content materials provided to the item writers; and reaffirms that the content standards and benchmarks and the content expectations are used as the basis for MEAP testing.

Based on the data and the oral and written comments, The Task Force supports:

- Transparency about test development procedures, including materials used by test development contractors and teacher involvement are need.
- The social studies test is perceived by some teachers as constantly changing.
- Providing teachers with a steady target.

9. The Michigan Department of Education investigates and makes a recommendation to the State Board of Education by July 1, 2005 on creating a set of grade level tests to be administered by local districts to evaluate yearly student achievement in social studies.

Based on the data and the oral and written comments, the Task Force believes it is necessary to address:

- Social studies being seen as a “stepchild to other subjects”.
- The negative affect of “pitting one subject against another” for importance in the curriculum.

10. The Michigan Department of Education requests the Task Force on Social Studies Assessment to continue their work on behalf of the MDE, providing leadership and serving as advisors for the implementation of all adopted recommendations.

Based on the advice of the Task Force:

The adopted recommendations must have a formally constituted group that will oversee and report on a regular basis to the State Board of Education on the progress towards reaching each of the adopted recommendations.

Conclusion

Based on the data presented by the Office of Assessment and Accountability and the recommendations and comments presented to the Task Force in writing and orally at the public forums held throughout the state of Michigan in July of 2004, we submit these recommendations with the hopes of your timely approval and implementation.

The Task Force recommends that the State Board of Education adopt the following policies:

- 1 Social studies will be *included in the Merit scholarship*.
- 2 The Michigan Department of Education conducts the process to establish appropriate MEAP *test cut scores* for elementary, middle, and high school social studies. The department will also review the last five years of social studies data and report back to the Superintendent of Public Instruction on the accuracy of the reporting of student achievement.

3. The Michigan Department of Education completes the development of *Grade Level Content Expectations for Social Studies*.
4. In consultation with ISD's, local school districts, public school academies, and professional organizations, the Michigan Department of Education develops and implements a comprehensive *communication plan* for reaching all teachers of social studies and their administrators with information about assessment and instruction, and availability of resources for teaching the social studies curriculum framework upon which the MEAP is built.
5. In conjunction with the ISD's, local school districts, public school academies, professional organizations, and universities, the Michigan Department of Education develops, facilitates funding, and monitors the implementation of a *professional development plan* for all administrators and teachers of social studies state wide.
6. Whenever changes are made to the MEAP, the design of the tests will follow the Policy on Learning Expectations as approved by the State Board of Education for Michigan students.
7. Pursuant to the SBE Policy on Learning Expectations for Michigan Students, the Task Force recommends that the inquiry and persuasive essay questions remain in the Social Studies MEAP Test, and that the MEAP office explore ways to weight those strands more equally with the four disciplinary strands, as recommended in the original MEAP Assessment Plan.
8. The Michigan Department of Education makes available to the public an annotated list of the social studies content materials provided to the item writers; and reaffirms that the content standards and benchmarks and the content expectations are used as the basis for MEAP testing.
9. The Michigan Department of Education investigates and makes a recommendation to the State Board of Education by July 1, 2005 on creating a set of grade level tests to be administered by local districts to evaluate yearly student achievement in social studies.
10. The Michigan Department of Education requests the Task Force on Social Studies Assessment to continue their work on behalf of the MDE providing leadership and serving as advisors for the implementation of all adopted recommendations.

The Task Force on Social Studies Assessment

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Summary of the Comments Presented to the Task Force on Social Studies Assessment

Very Frequent Responses¹

- Not part of the Merit scholarships diminishing the importance of the social studies in the eyes of high school students, counselors and teachers (34)
- Too many benchmarks for teachers to be expected to teach effectively (35)
- Professional development for social studies needed (46)
- Cut scores have been inappropriately set too rigorously (31)

Frequent Response²

- Developmentally inappropriate (24)

Often Heard Responses³

- Teachers lack the specific content knowledge to teach social studies (11)
- We need Grade Level Content Expectations for social studies (17)
- Too much time is spent on reading and math because of NCLB little time is left in the elementary school day for anything else (11)
- Local Curriculums are not aligned to the content standards and benchmarks (11)
- Not enough money is available for materials necessary to teach social studies well (15)
- Social studies vocabulary is too difficult (16)
- Not enough time to teach social studies (11)
- Communication about the social studies MEAP and the HST needs to improve so that teachers receive the information they need (11)
- Test is too difficult (17)

Repeated Responses⁴

- A statewide curriculum is needed that was not written by and for only southeastern Michigan (6)
- The test and our expectations of student are not too hard, stretching is good (9)
- The test is constantly changing we need a steady target (9)
- Integration of different content and subjects is needed (7)
- Move the test to fall and test in grades six and nine (6)

¹ Cited as a factor thirty to forty-five times

² Cited as a factor from twenty to twenty-nine times

³ Cited eleven to nineteen times

⁴ Cited five to ten times

- **Keep the social studies MEAP (7)**
- **Social studies is a stepchild subject and not treated equally to others (8)**
- **The MEAP results need to come back faster (5)**
- **Test questions are too picky and do not reflect broad themes or important information (8)**
- **Economics is too difficult and should be taught in high school only (9)**
- **Civics is too hard (5)**
- **Standardized tests do not recognize individual differences (5)**

Responses Heard Four Times

- **The social studies tests are given last which affects students performance**
- **Lack of networking and collaborative opportunities impact negatively on teacher effectiveness**
- **Students are doing well in social studies**
- **Extended response questions must relate more to student experiences**
- **Test is a reading test**
- **Item analysis reports are needed to improve information given to the teachers**

Responses Heard Three Times

- **Students are not ready to be the abstract thinkers that the test demands**
- **Teacher preparation standards are needed so that teachers are better trained while still at the university or college level**
- **English as a second language learners should be exempt from testing**
- **The socio-economic status of students counts in their performance**
- **The test is developmentally appropriate**
- **Social studies is an important subject**
- **The benchmarks are appropriate for students**
- **The data which is given on student performance is not understood**

Responses Heard Twice

- **More help is need from the state curriculum consultant**
- **The public has a negative attitude about social studies**
- **Too many trick questions make students look bad**
- **Teachers should be able to keep copies of the tests**
- **More support is needed for teachers who teach controversial issues**

Response Heard Once

- Teachers should be members of the reviewing and scoring committees
 - The test should be based on the standards and benchmarks
 - All teachers should be part of the preparation for the MEAP, not just the teacher who administers it
 - Social studies as a subject is a “endangered species”
 - Geography is too hard for students to learn
 - Students take the test seriously it doesn’t matter if it is part of the Merit scholarship program or not
 - We should dump history it is not meaningful to students
 - The Upper Peninsula is punished for not having low MEAP scores
 - Using computer technology takes up too much classroom time
 - Government should only be taught in High School
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- Test is too wordy
 - Testing should stay in January
 - Stickers for diplomas should be reinstated for students who pass their HST in all subjects including social studies
 - Rural students lack current event knowledge and are at a disadvantage on the extended response questions
 - Dual enrollment forces students to take government too early—as freshman or sophomores
 - Core Democratic Values are good for students to learn
 - There are no civics and economics resources for elementary students
 - Michigan history should be a high school subject
 - Many teachers do not teach the same subject or grade two years in a row making it very difficult for them to gain the expertise they need to teach the social studies subjects
-
- The social studies MEAP has had a positive affect on teacher behavior and has changed things for the better
 - Pilot tests are needed to see if the questions are good
 - We should not pit one subject against another which is what happens when the social studies test is not part of the Merit
 - “Kids” don’t like social studies
 - NCSS standards should be used for social studies
 - “True” statements should not be used as distracters on the test
 - Range finding papers need to be made public
 - The Michigan Curriculum Framework is a good document and should be used
 - We need to keep the focus on citizenship
 - We need to continue teaching American History

- A longer “test window” would help in the administration of the test
- Michigan Department of Education web site is bad and hard to use
- Teachers need to be able to see the test
- Keep the test at grade five
- Use PASS—Powerful and Authentic Social Studies as a professional development model
- Don’t switch to ACT
- De-emphasize the Michigan Curriculum Framework in favor of what is actually in the textbooks
- Students have to take too many courses in social studies in high school in only two years
- Students need civics
- Social studies should be included in the ELA expository reading test

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