

The State of State Standards for Civics and U.S. History in 2021



By Jeremy A. Stern, Ph.D., Alison E. Brody, José A. Gregory, Stephen Griffith, and Jonathan Pulvers
with David Griffith and Amber M. Northern

Foreword by David Griffith and Chester E. Finn, Jr.



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Although our team has striven for fairness, accuracy, and clarity, we have no doubt that somewhere in this nearly 400-page document, sharp-eyed readers may happen upon an error or poorly worded sentence. We apologize in advance.

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Foreword

By David Griffith and Chester E. Finn, Jr.

Is America a racist country? Or the greatest nation on earth? Or both or neither or some of each?

For the sake of our children’s education (and for any number of other reasons), we need a more thoughtful and balanced starting point for the whole conversation—one that leaves space for nuance, mutual understanding, and hope for the future. Our union is not perfect, but it will become more so if its citizens understand, value, and engage productively with the constitutional democracy in which we all live.

Sadly, far too many young (and not-so-young) Americans have only the haziest grasp of the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that are essential to informed citizenship, in part because for decades now we have systematically failed to impart them to our children. Culpability for that failure goes far beyond our formal education system, to be sure, but a considerable portion of it does belong there: on our schools, our school systems, and our state K–12 systems, which have focused—and been pressed by Washington to focus—on other priorities.

The consequences of that neglect are now painfully apparent on all sides, including the sorry state of American politics and the sordid behavior of many who would lead us. Rectifying the situation is an enormous project to be pursued on multiple fronts, but schools are an obvious starting point. That’s where we can best begin to inculcate the next generation of Americans with a solid grasp of their country’s past and present, its core principles, and the obligations of responsible citizenship.

The logical starting points for getting that right are the academic standards for civics and U.S. History that have been adopted by the fifty states and the District of Columbia. That’s because our federal system of government ensures that states and their subdivisions bear primary responsibility for education, which includes establishing academic standards that spell out the content and skills they want their public schools to teach and their students to learn. These standards are typically organized by subject, though in the realms of civics and history they are sometimes organized under the heading of “social studies.”

We at the Thomas B. Fordham Institute have been evaluating states’ academic standards for more than two decades. Consequently, we’re well aware that they are just the starting point—statements of aspirations, desired outcomes, and intentions. To get real traction, they must be joined by high-quality instructional materials and pedagogy, sufficient time and effort, and some form of

“Our union is not perfect, but it will become more so if its citizens understand, value, and engage productively with the constitutional democracy in which we all live.”

results-based accountability. We understand, in other words, that standards aren't self-implementing. But we also understand that, like any other road map, instruction manual, or recipe, they cannot be vague, badly organized, or misleading if those who rely on them for guidance are to succeed.

Fordham has reviewed the U.S. History standards of the fifty states and the District of Columbia four times before (in 1998, 2000, 2003, and 2011). Yet nobody, to our knowledge, has ever reviewed these jurisdictions' civics standards—a lamentable oversight that we here seek to rectify and at an especially opportune moment, given the mounting interest in the subject that we see on all sides.

We tackled the two subjects simultaneously because, in our view, they cannot really be disentangled. Yet neither are they synonymous or coextensive, especially in the higher grades.

As you'll see below, our dual review has yielded results that might be compared to a cloudy sky in which we can still glimpse a handful of stars. Sixteen jurisdictions made our reviewers' honor roll with grades in the A or B range for their standards in both civics and U.S. History (see *Appendix* for the review criteria). Encouragingly, these states run the gamut from deep red to deep blue. Collectively, they serve over 25 million K–12 students—roughly half the country's total public-school enrollment. Still, that leaves thirty-five states that earned Cs or worse, including twenty that got unsatisfactory marks (i.e., Ds or Fs) in both subjects.

As it happens, that distribution roughly mirrors what the Nation's Report Card (NAEP) has shown about students' knowledge and understanding: as of 2018, not quite a quarter of eighth graders were proficient in civics, and even fewer—a meager 15 percent—were proficient in U.S. History. This lackluster showing suggests an enormous challenge for the future of American citizenship. Why are so many states—and students—doing so poorly?

Part of the explanation is simple, if painful: faced with so many other educational demands, including but not limited to NCLB- and ESSA-driven accountability requirements imposed by the federal government, states just haven't paid enough attention to ensuring that standards for civics and U.S. History are strong, that teachers are well prepared in these subjects, that districts and schools give them their due, and that students actually learn them. But another—and fast-growing—part of the explanation is more fundamental and worrisome: basic disagreement about how to tell the American story and determine what's most important for young people to learn.

One potential response to this challenge is to abandon the quest for consensus, plunge into schismatic politics and culture wars, and just duke it out. (See, for example, President Trump's 1776 Commission and the *New York Times's* 1619 Project.) Alternatively, we can paper over differences, avoid specifics, and settle for vague generalizations that everyone can pay lip service to but that convey no useful guidance to teachers. (Why argue about the three-fifths clause when it's so much easier to say that students should study the Constitution?) Or perhaps states should simply delegate all responsibility for selecting civics and U.S. history content—if any—to districts, schools, or teachers.

In our view, none of these responses will do. Every young American needs and deserves a rich and balanced civics and U.S. History education. Informed citizenship is impossible if you don't know how a bill becomes a law or why many African Americans were denied suffrage even after passage of the Fifteenth Amendment. Many skills and dispositions that are commonly associated with civic education, such as respecting other persons and their opinions, are also part of character education.

Furthermore, the broader social purpose of civic education is to provide a common framework for resolving our differences even as we respect them—that is, to manage peacefully and constructively the eternal balancing and rebalancing of *pluribus* and

“There is no such thing as ‘progressive civics’ or ‘conservative civics,’ because if you have to put an adjective in front of it, it isn’t really civics. ”

unum—and ultimately, *that* calls for shared allegiance to a common set of ideas and core principles that is grounded in a common understanding. In other words, there is no such thing as “progressive civics” or “conservative civics,” because if you have to put an adjective in front of it, it isn’t really civics.

Hence our insistence, reflected in the substance of several reviews, that civics and U.S. History standards both give America’s core principles and many achievements the respect they are due *and* not whitewash, downplay, or neglect the many painful chapters in our nation’s history. Quality standards neither falter under obsessive wokeness nor avoid the threats posed to present-day civil discourse by gerrymandering, closed primaries, and echo-chamber media (among other forces).

No, it’s not easy. But the actual proves the possible, and the sixteen jurisdictions with honors grades—and the awesome five with A’s in both subjects—demonstrate that it has been and can be done.

Our review team was bipartisan. On the history side, it was led by Jeremy Stern, Ph.D., a professional historian who conducted our last U.S. History review (in 2011), and included José Gregory, an award-winning U.S. History teacher. On the civics side, the burden was shared among Steve Griffith, Alison Brody, and Jonathan Pulvers, teachers and coaches at a nationally recognized high school civics program in Portland, Oregon.

To ensure that we hit as many keys as possible without losing the melody, we ran our review criteria and the final report past a formidable panel of external advisors including Louise Dubé, Executive Director of iCivics; Peter Gibbon, Ph.D., of Boston University; Meira Levinson, D.Phil., of the Harvard Graduate School of Education; Jeffrey Rosen, President and CEO of the National Constitution Center; and John Wood, Jr., author and national leader at Braver Angels. Their thoughtful—sometimes complimentary, sometimes critical—observations about the final product can be found on pages 8-13.

Broadly speaking, our vision for state standards for civics and U.S. History is consistent with the “roadmap” recently put forward by the Educating for American Democracy (EAD) initiative, which one of us (Finn) advised on and which the Thomas B. Fordham Institute has endorsed. Like the EAD roadmap, our criteria for evaluating states’ standards are rooted in the conviction that educators must not duck the tough issues. Instead, we urge those closer to the ground to lean *into* the debate by asking kids to consider the inherent tensions and unavoidable tradeoffs that are so often at work when it comes to these issues and insisting that they listen to one another, dialogue respectfully, and disagree agreeably.

* * *

As we conclude this review, which reflects our knowledge of states’ officially adopted standards as of May 1, 2021, at least a quarter of the states are in the process of revising their civics and/or U.S. History standards, while others are working to change their graduation requirements or adopt new assessments. In a number of places, politics and ideology have reared their heads as law-makers debate or enact measures spelling out what must or must not be taught in these contentious realms. Banishing politics is beyond our reach, but we have thought hard about what should be done by states where standards for civics and U.S. history are already in flux and by the many jurisdictions where standards need improvement. One good option, of course, is to borrow heavily from places with exemplary standards! Besides that, we offer four recommendations, which reappear in somewhat different form in the multi-authored report that follows.

1. Incorporate substantive civics content into every grade in elementary and middle school and ensure that students complete at least one full cycle of U.S. History before high school.

Like our reviewers, we believe that civics and U.S. History should be prioritized from the moment children set foot in Kindergarten. Yet while most states include some U.S. History at the K–8 level, few offer a full introductory survey of U.S.

History prior to high school (to be followed by a second, more advanced pass during high school). Similarly, although many states have some good civics content for the K–8 grades, few make the most of the many opportunities for civic learning that exist within the state, national, and world histories (and other social studies subjects) that are typically taught during elementary and middle school. In addition to doing history and civics a disservice, this patchy approach weakens efforts to build students’ *reading* comprehension, which research suggests is improved by spending more time on social studies in the early grades.¹

2. Specifically require that high school students take *at least one year of U.S. History and at least one semester of Civics—or better yet, a full year of Civics—to graduate.*

Currently, at least three states—Montana, Pennsylvania, and Vermont—don’t specifically require *any* civics or U.S. History courses in high school.² Moreover, at least six other states—Kentucky, Minnesota, Nebraska, Rhode Island, Wisconsin, and Wyoming—have ambiguous statutes, with the result that some districts and/or schools may not actually require the study of civics and/or U.S. History.³ Finally, a few states have reasonably clear but inherently weak requirements. For example, Maine requires one credit in American history *and* government, while Colorado requires a single course in state *and* national history *and* government, which is too much to ask of any individual course or teacher.

We understand that some districts in states with weak or ambiguous requirements nonetheless require civics and U.S. History courses. We’re also well aware that course mandates don’t assure that schools will teach and students will learn what’s in a state’s standards. But the absence of specific requirements that all of a state’s students seriously engage with these two essential subjects during high school is a lamentable oversight on the part of any such state.⁴

3. Specify what students should *know* in both subjects, in addition to the essential skills and dispositions that educators should seek to cultivate.

Please deliver us (and our long-suffering reviewers) from standards that settle for suggesting students “investigate” the functions of their state government or “critique” the Colonial period! Before kids can critique something, they need to know something. And before they can do much investigating, they need some understanding of what they’re investigating and why it matters. (In practice, the states with exemplary civics and U.S. History standards generally agree on what students should understand.) Once students know there was a Constitutional Convention and a Civil War—and a great deal more—they can and should be asked to think critically about any number of issues associated with those key events. But even the most thoughtful students need something to think critically *about*. Else it’s just opinion.

4. Hold schools and students accountable for the teaching and learning of civics and U.S. History.

That doesn’t necessarily mean more testing, although a majority of states administer at least one social studies, U.S. History, or civics assessment. But it does mean finding ways to ensure that schools are effectively imparting the crucial content of U.S. History and civics—think curriculum, time allocation, and teacher preparation—and that students emerge with a reasonable grasp of that content, as well as the accompanying skills and dispositions.⁵

1. Adam Tyner and Sarah Kabourek. *Social Studies Instruction and Reading Comprehension: Evidence from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study*. Washington D.C.: Thomas B. Fordham Institute (September 2020). <https://fordhaminstitute.org/national/resources/social-studies-instruction-and-reading-comprehension>.

2. Pennsylvania does require such coursework at some point in grades 7-12, and Montana and Vermont both require “social studies.” Oregon recently added a semester of civics to its graduation requirements but still doesn’t require any U.S. History.

3. Massachusetts is a borderline case, since it strongly promotes U.S history through MassCore.

4. Technically, our reviewers didn’t evaluate states’ graduation requirements, although in practice the quality of a state’s graduation requirements was often indicative of the quality of its high school standards.

5. Note that our reviewers didn’t evaluate states’ accountability systems and don’t necessarily share our views on accountability.

FOREWORD

Imagine for a moment what would happen if fifth- and eighth-grade students were quizzed on the three branches of government and Bill of Rights, as well as the basics of the Revolutionary War, the Civil War, and the Civil Rights Movement (among other topics). Wouldn't more of them enter high school with the kind of basic information that would allow them to succeed in the civics and U.S. History material they encounter there?

And now imagine that, in *addition* to taking courses in civics and U.S. History, every high school senior was also required to write a capstone paper on the historical background of a current social or political problem, the costs and benefits of potential solutions to it, and possible means of addressing it—for example, through legislation or advocacy. Wouldn't we in time find ourselves with more adults who understand the basic workings of American democracy and the meaning of citizenship within that democracy?

Learning can be demonstrated in many different ways, but if states don't insist on demonstrated knowledge and understanding of civics and U.S. History before they hurl their young people forward into adulthood, not nearly enough of that learning is going to happen. And if this doesn't happen in our public schools, where will it?

Comments from External Advisors

Comments from Louise Dubé, Executive Director of iCivics

For our constitutional democracy to survive, much rests on our ability to resolve “*differences even as we respect them*,” which is *The State of State Standards for Civics and History in 2021* report’s definition of the social purpose of civic education.

State standards range from a “skills” orientation where academic content makes a scant appearance to content-heavy standards with embedded skills. A good educator will deliver deep learning using any set of standards, and many believe that standards are irrelevant as a result. Yet, standards play a particularly critical role in history and civics precisely because these subjects aren’t tested at the same rate as other disciplines. In the absence of such tests, standards are the only roadmap that educators share. They ensure that education stakeholders have a shared understanding of a coherent learning progression that has the potential for young people to graduate equipped to be engaged in civic life.

As the foreword notes, I was a principal investigator of the Educating for American Democracy (EAD) initiative. Our Roadmap provides guidance to educators, as well as local and state administrators, about how to achieve excellence in K–12 civics and U.S. History. The report recommends approaches also found in the EAD Roadmap such as the benefits of braiding instruction in history and civics together. The report criteria have a bias toward content rigor and depth, which is particularly important in disciplines that have shied away from potential controversy. To support the social purpose of civic education, states should lean into the design challenges inherent to our nation. It is impossible to imagine a quality instructional program in STEM without molecular composition, so why would civics and U.S. History be content with a requirement to “present adaptations of arguments and explanations that feature evocative ideas and perspectives on issues and topics to reach a range of audiences and venues outside the classroom”?⁶ While adapting arguments using evocative ideas might be useful, this standard needs to be anchored to rigorous content to serve as an effective learning goal.

The report makes a significant contribution to the field precisely because of the specificity with which the authors illustrate what constitutes rigorous standards. The detailed explanations and illustrations will prove helpful to state administrators as they evolve their standards.

Among other highlights, I welcome the report’s focus on the importance of elementary preparation for higher-level work, which has been overlooked for too long.

I was also glad to see the report attend to race and diversity. These hotly contested issues require transparency and focus precisely because they represent the legacy of the country’s history. However, the debate about how to teach about racism goes well beyond

6. Iowa, SS9-12.9

slavery. In part, it is about which stories are told and which ones are not, and whether our country has one story or many. The stories we tell should reflect the students we teach and be selected to help students understand today's world. The report is not sufficiently explicit regarding these issues, and the evaluation criteria would have benefitted from the inclusion of specific criteria about whether racism, equity, inclusion, and diversity issues are adequately covered in state standards.

I would have also welcomed more emphasis on digital informational literacy, precisely because our polity is struggling with the scale and noise of digital (mis)information. This is a recent development that would have warranted attention in the review criteria.

Setting standards reflects choices about what to teach given the time constraints in K–12. Today, the complexity of our constitutional democracy requires that students know more not less, but the time available for instruction has not been extended. Therefore, administrators are asked to make choices that are even more difficult than those they made in the past. Although it would be easier for administrators to add to already-long lists of standards, that will only place the burden to choose on individual educators and provide no clear path to meet the state's instructional goals.

Given the tough choices that will need to be made, I urge state administrators to place greater emphasis on conceptual understanding or meaning making in a world that needs historical perspective to untangle. Learning expectations should extend beyond learning about individual historical events or facts, and link to larger themes in U.S. History and civics, as in: "Describe the efforts that have been made over time to build a *more perfect union*" and explain how the perspectives on this question differ depending on whether people have or have not had access to political rights." EAD has proposed seven themes as well as sets of questions that encompass this body of knowledge for K–12 civics and U.S. History. The difficult task for state administrators will be to set out what students should understand to graduate prepared for civic life and no more. The EAD Roadmap will prove a helpful guide in that process.

As state administrators update and upgrade social studies standards, it might help to assess the traditional approach to improving literacy over the past several decades, which has relegated discipline knowledge (and importantly, learner interests) to the background. Without the learner engaged in the act of learning, nothing is gained. Putting history and civics (as well as STEM) at the core of the school experience, should be viewed as an important—and more effective—approach to literacy.

I welcome the report and the guidance it provides state administrators and other stakeholders. The report is exhaustive and well researched, and it will prove a useful guide to strengthen U.S. History and civics standards and a guide as to how to do so.

— **Louise Dubé**
Executive Director
iCivics

Comments from Peter Gibbon, Ph.D.

Gone are the days when we could all agree with Ben Franklin’s sunny admonition, “Indeed the general tendency of reading good history must be to fix in the minds of youth deep impressions of the beauty and usefulness of virtue of all kinds.” Instead, we must cope with political polarization, schools preoccupied with the achievement gap, students who learn from social media, and adults who are too often disdainful of reason and facts (and who have lost confidence in American institutions).

The foreword to this report, coauthored by Chester E. Finn, Jr. and David Griffith, acknowledges these challenges, conceding there is “disagreement as to how to tell the American story.” Echoing the foreword, the report emphasizes “consensus” and “compromise.” It also reminds us that standards matter insofar as they influence “teacher preparation and professional-development programs” and serve as “the basis for specific curriculum decisions made by districts, schools, and individual teachers.”

Commendably, the report critiques the “broad, vague, and/or nebulous language” that characterizes many states’ standards. But not all is doom and gloom. Amid polarized debate, “many states have a reasonable handle on the issue of race and don’t downplay its significance.” Similarly, “coverage of early Native American history is reasonably strong in many states.”

The report emphasizes writing and argumentation based on evidence and argues that, in an age of alternative facts, it’s important “to think logically and communicate clearly.” As the review criteria suggest, skills development (for example, learning about cause and effect and explaining bias) is crucial and needs to accompany factual knowledge. Similarly, essential dispositions (respect for other persons and opinions) are important. To teach young people about “confirmation bias” is a worthy, if difficult, ideal and might indeed deter “the polarization and misinformation that plague American politics.”

The report probably cannot use the term “informed patriotism” as a goal for history and civics instruction. I will settle for “commitment to American institutions and ideals.” As the authors appropriately editorialize, “It’s incredibly important for students to internalize what it means to be an American from an early age.” We don’t have heroes, but the report does approve standards that include a long list of “historical role models.” But why role models only in the lower grades? Though the report doesn’t endorse “action civics,” it does approve of “active participation” and “successful service-learning projects.”

In practice, not all of the “essential knowledge” the report identifies can be covered in the average classroom or remembered by the average student, so some instructors will argue for a “less-is-more” approach for “deeper learning.” Less credibly, some states will rationalize vagueness by saying it is up to the individual school district to fill in content, although the report convincingly argues that standards “can’t be vague, badly organized, or misleading” and that “without a clear destination and a map that shows the way, one’s journey is bound to be endless and probably fruitless.” Still, even if there is reasonable disagreement about the extensive knowledge suggested, there should be approbation for the many examples of skills to be acquired and essential dispositions to be demonstrated.

As the report indicates, the states with exemplary ratings have “admirably well-organized, clearly written, and user-friendly standards” that are full of specifics. For example, both the Massachusetts and California curriculum frameworks provide compelling introductions to American history, from which other states could learn.

Ultimately, the report is valuable because it is very deliberately impartial. Well-written and sprinkled with illuminating “sidebars,” commendations, and critiques, it should be read by policymakers, principals—and above all—the teachers who are key to making history and civics central in K–12 education and encouraging the next generation to commit themselves to reasoned discourse and civic responsibility.

— Peter Gibbon, Ph.D.

Senior Research Associate

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Comments from Meira Levinson, D.Phil.

Because I haven't had the chance to read all fifty-one states' civics and U.S. History standards, allow me to highlight some features of the review criteria that I am excited about and those that lead the reviewers to draw conclusions about which I am skeptical.

I generally like the three essential civic skills of critical thinking, problem analysis, and advocacy, although I would expand each. For example, the advocacy skills have a relatively limited focus on trying to persuade others (as well as changing their own minds as needed). But in my view, advocacy should encompass a broader set of skills, including listening, coalition building, determining when and how to engage, and so forth. Furthermore, I'm concerned that the account of advocacy is too idealized, as part of participating in civic life effectively is learning when, why, and how to engage when rational argumentation is *not* the order of the day. As much as we might wish that deliberative democracy was the norm, as a practical matter, it's crucial that young people learn to make change via non-deliberative levers of power.

Similarly, I enthusiastically agree that "some civic dispositions are habitual, meaning they should be practiced as well as preached, which is why the strongest civics standards insist on students' active participation." But why limit the justification for active civic participation to students' acquisition of dispositions? Civics is the only field of study that primarily teaches students how *other* people do the thing being studied (i.e., citizenship), rather than teaching them to do it themselves. In English, science, drama, PE, math, etc., we expect students to read and write, conduct experiments, put on plays, scrimmage, and complete problem sets. Citizenship should be the same, because how children learn is the same across these fields: through authentic engagement and practice, not just through hearing stories of others' achievements. Because I suspect that I'm preaching to the converted, I'm mostly just pushing the reviewers to be even more firm in their demand that exemplary civics standards encourage students to participate civically.

The reviewers are also right to link knowledge, skills, and dispositions; happily, those involved in history, civics, and social studies education have (mostly) gotten beyond the "knowledge vs. skills" debate and acknowledged both that effective skills development helps students build knowledge and vice versa. That said, I am less sanguine than the reviewers seem to be about the extent to which knowledge-oriented standards will be implemented to encourage high-quality skills development. There is just too long a history of teachers' treating packed knowledge standards as content to be marched through via textbooks, videos, worksheets, and tests emphasizing memorization, rather than as ideas, events, and phenomena to be engaged with through deep, skillful inquiry. Consequently, I tend to favor standards that err on the side of "abstract skillsets"—in part because skills are impossible to inculcate without transmitting knowledge—rather than on the side of content coverage.

Finally, I take more substantial issue with the repeated emphasis on teaching U.S. history *chronologically* as a means of capturing "*the* American story." Frankly, I don't believe "the" American story exists, nor do I believe we should be teaching U.S. History as if there were one story (no matter how inclusive that story may be) rather than a cacophonous multiplicity of stories. This is not a postmodern claim. Rather, it is a claim that the United States, in all its gorgeous and ghastly complexity, has always had too much going on to capture in a single telling. In my opinion, it is a profound historical *and* civic mistake to teach children that they can master *the* story of our country. Americans should learn about some events, institutions, processes, phenomena, and people deeply, and through that deep inquiry, also learn that virtually everything we think we know about the U.S. is incomplete, and that one element of good citizenship is being curious about the stories, interpretations, and new discoveries of which we were formerly unaware.

The other problem with trying to teach a comprehensive American story is that it inevitably—and paradoxically—ends up elevating narrow coverage over multivocal complexity. The essential knowledge outlined in the criteria for both civics and U.S. History emphasize political and institutional history and civics to the detriment of social, labor, environmental, economic, military, or cultural history and civic production. In so doing, it also centers "insider" versus "outsider" history and civic engagement, and it centers White and often male actors at the expense of others. I am not arguing that exemplary standards would *also* incorporate all of these other histories and forms of civic production into a comprehensive chronology; then it would take five years, not two,

to “cover” U.S. History! Instead, comprehensive coverage should be set aside in favor of deep dives into a smaller number of core events, phenomena, processes, institutions, and people that can permit a more layered inquiry and understanding of historical complexity.

Taking this approach would also allow educators to foster historical learning that better informs students’ engagement with contemporary issues. I appreciate the reviewers’ concerns that history education not be hijacked by ahistorical, presentist analyses or motivations. But the truth is that we care about students’ historical competence in part because historical understanding is crucial to contemporary citizenship and having collectively studied a long list of topics for two to three days each doesn’t actually “provide a common framework for resolving our differences even as we respect them.” In practice, no student learns enough about the Great Depression, the Alien and Sedition Acts, or the Civil Rights Movement to have a meaningful and accurate conversation with fellow citizens about how these histories apply to present-day challenges, so the real risk is that they think their understanding is sufficient. Far better to help students recognize historical complexity and participate in civic life with curiosity and the conviction that they need to learn more than to feed them a single, superficial historical story. I’m sure that’s not what the reviewers intend, but it may be the impact of the report.

— **Meira Levinson, D.Phil.**

Professor of Education

Harvard Graduate School of Education

Comments from Jeffrey Rosen, President and CEO of the National Constitution Center

As noted in the foreword of the Fordham Institute’s nonpartisan report, “there is no such thing as ‘progressive civics’ or ‘conservative civics,’ because if you have to put an adjective in front of it, it isn’t really civics.” As the report suggests, it is urgently important to teach history and civics from a nonpartisan perspective. The National Constitution Center agrees that the purpose of civics education “is to provide a common framework for resolving our differences even as we respect them”—a framework rooted in the U.S. Constitution.

The Fordham report and the Educating for American Democracy initiative provide helpful nonpartisan models for the states as they revise their history and civics standards; however, the report doesn’t examine the ways in which the states are implementing their civics standards in practice, nor does it give examples of model civics curricula that could meet the standards it rightly praises. The National Constitution Center’s Interactive Constitution offers free and nonpartisan Constitution 101 classes and materials that allow all middle and high school students and teachers to meet the history and civics framework endorsed by the Fordham report and by the nonpartisan Educating for American Democracy initiative.

— **Jeffrey Rosen**

President and CEO

National Constitution Center

Comments from John Wood, Jr., National Ambassador for Braver Angels

The Thomas B. Fordham Institute’s review of state standards for civics and U.S. History comes at a critical moment in American civic life. As a nation, we are failing to maintain a high-functioning democratic society on multiple fronts. This sorry state of affairs has everything to do with the polarization of our politics, which is partly due to the fact that we have little sense of shared identity as Americans. And that lack of shared identity, in turn, owes substantially to the fact that we lack a reliably shared sense of American history, the workings of our government, and (perhaps most importantly) the expectations associated with a culture of citizenship.

In this outstanding report, the Fordham Institute identifies the ways in which state standards successfully articulate, or fail to put forward, pathways for developing these shared areas of knowledge and civic character development in American students. In so doing, it does a great service by advancing both our general and our specific awareness (in the context of primary and secondary education) of the need for a better roadmap.

In particular, the ideal vision of civics and U.S. History put forward in this report is appropriately rooted in the outline of an age-appropriate, sufficiently comprehensive curriculum that helps students understand what it means to be an American while also developing the skills and dispositions that are essential to fulfilling the responsibilities of citizenship. Toward those ends, this report takes solid inventory not just of the spread of topics and themes that states currently cover but of their narrative consistency. Civic education cannot be about checking the boxes of required topics outside of the necessary historical context. The development of civic skill and character rests most firmly on the bedrock of historical understanding, which is why the report’s attention to the arc of history is so important to our understanding of the care (or lack thereof) that states currently take in cultivating civic understanding and awareness in our students.

The report focuses on the need for us to find a balance between the *unum* and the *pluribus* in American civic life. Therefore part of what it rightly demands is that sufficient attention be paid to the histories of America’s various ethnic groups in a way that weaves these histories into the broader flow of American history. Per the sidebar on page 26, it’s encouraging to read that many states have made real progress when it comes to giving more considerable attention to the rich and complex history of African Americans and other groups within their standards. But the report also makes clear that there is significant work left to be done.

In practice, any attempt to weave the histories of particular groups into a balanced overview of our shared history is an invitation to controversy, and completely eliminating bias can seem an impossible task. But the best corrective when it comes to this and other matters of politics and historical interpretation is a civic disposition rooted firmly in respect for the views of our fellow citizens and the expectation that there will be serious and valid disputes in a pluralistic society, so it’s a great stride forward that this report analyzes the attention paid to this, as well as other civic virtues and dispositions, in state standards.

States with inconsistent approaches to the transmission of historical and civic understanding may need to revisit their understanding of the purposes of these subjects. It is tempting, with limited resources and any number of competing educational imperatives, to stick them wherever they seem to fit in our current K–12 system. Likewise, ignoring or glossing over difficult concepts or parts of our history may seem like the safe thing to do. But if we truly care about the long-term sustainability (or even the medium-term stability) of our democratic society, we must invest the requisite thought and resources.

The cultivation of a deeper appreciation for our shared history as the foundation for an ever-strengthening relationship with the sacred concept of citizenship isn’t a self-executing project. It requires state standards that actually hold us to such standards. This report is a vital step forward in the struggle to focus American attention on this duty. May we rise to its call.

— **John Wood, Jr.**
National Ambassador
Braver Angels

I. Executive Summary

This report evaluates the quality of the K–12 civics and U.S. History standards adopted by the fifty states and the District of Columbia as of May 1, 2021, based on their content, rigor, clarity, and organization (see *Appendix*).

Reviewers assigned summative grades in each subject, which were combined into overall ratings (see Table ES-1).

Ultimately, five jurisdictions received “exemplary” ratings based on their A– grades in both subjects: Alabama, California, Massachusetts, Tennessee, and the District of Columbia (New York’s U.S. History standards are also “exemplary”).

Another ten states, led by Georgia, Oklahoma, and Virginia, received “good” ratings because they earned grades in the B range in both subjects.

Three states (Texas, Ohio, and Louisiana) were deemed “good” in one subject but “mediocre” in the other.

Eight states were rated “mediocre” in both subjects.

Four states were rated “mediocre” in one subject and “inadequate” in the other.

Finally, twenty states were rated “inadequate,” meaning they received “D” or “F” grades in both subjects.

Per the table, most states received identical or very similar grades in both subjects, but there are a few states—Texas, Ohio, and Louisiana—with notably stronger standards in one subject than the other.

In general, states with “exemplary” civics and U.S. History standards...

- 1. Effectively articulate what every American should know about this country’s democratic institutions, traditions, and history.**
- 2. Emphasize skills that are essential to informed citizenship such as critical thinking, problem analysis, and evaluating, interpreting, and arguing from evidence.**
- 3. Champion essential civic dispositions such as respect for other persons and opinions, an inclination to serve, and a commitment to American institutions and ideals.**
- 4. Make effective use of elementary and middle school and require at least one year of U.S. History and one semester of Civics in high school.**
- 5. Develop user friendly standards documents that are well organized and clearly written.**

In contrast, states with inadequate civics and U.S. History standards...

1. Provide overbroad, vague, or otherwise insufficient guidance for curriculum and instruction.
2. Omit or seriously underemphasize topics that are essential to informed citizenship and historical comprehension.
3. Make poor use of the early grades or fail to revisit essential content in later grades.
4. Take an overly rigid or needlessly complex approach to organization.
5. Pay little attention to writing, argumentation, problem analysis, and the connections between core content and current issues and events.

To address these weaknesses, we recommend that states take the following actions:

1. Maximize civics and U.S. History coverage in elementary and middle school and require at least one year of U.S. History and one semester of Civics in high school.
2. Provide more specific and detailed guidance in both subjects.
3. Put more emphasis on writing, argumentation, problem analysis, and the connections between core content and current events.
4. Take a simpler, more flexible, and more user-friendly approach to the organization and presentation of their standards.
5. Address specific oversights and gaps in coverage (per the individual state reviews).

Detailed accounts of the strengths and weaknesses of each state’s civics and U.S. History standards—plus state-specific recommendations for addressing those weaknesses—can be found in the individual state profiles.

Table ES-1. Final State Grades and Ratings

STATE	CIVICS GRADE	U.S. HISTORY GRADE	OVERALL RATING
Alabama	A-	A-	Exemplary
California	A-	A-	Exemplary
District of Columbia	A-	A-	Exemplary
Massachusetts	A-	A-	Exemplary
Tennessee	A-	A-	Exemplary
New York	B+	A-	Good/Exemplary
Georgia	B+	B+	Good
Oklahoma	B+	B+	Good
Virginia	B+	B+	Good
Indiana	B+	B	Good

Continued

Table ES-1. Final State Grades and Ratings *(continued)*

STATE	CIVICS GRADE	U.S. HISTORY GRADE	OVERALL RATING
Maryland	B+	B	Good
Florida	B	B	Good
Michigan	B	B	Good
South Carolina	B	B	Good
Mississippi	B	B-	Good
Minnesota	B-	B-	Good
Texas	B+	C+	Good/Mediocre
Ohio	B	C	Good/Mediocre
Louisiana	C+	B+	Mediocre/Good
Hawaii	C+	C	Mediocre
West Virginia	C	C+	Mediocre
Arkansas	C	C	Mediocre
Kentucky	C	C	Mediocre
New Jersey	C	C	Mediocre
Utah	C	C	Mediocre
Missouri	C	C	Mediocre
New Mexico	C	C-	Mediocre
Arizona	C-	D+	Mediocre/Inadequate
Kansas	C-	D+	Mediocre/Inadequate
South Dakota	C-	D+	Mediocre/Inadequate
Connecticut	D+	C-	Inadequate/Mediocre
North Dakota	D+	D+	Inadequate
Colorado	D	D	Inadequate
Washington	D	D	Inadequate
Nebraska	D	D-	Inadequate
Idaho	D	F	Inadequate
Iowa	D	F	Inadequate
Nevada	D	F	Inadequate
Rhode Island	D	F	Inadequate
North Carolina	D-	F	Inadequate
Oregon	D-	F	Inadequate
Alaska	F	F	Inadequate

Table ES-1. Final State Grades and Ratings *(continued)*

STATE	CIVICS GRADE	U.S. HISTORY GRADE	OVERALL RATING
Delaware	F	F	Inadequate
Illinois	F	F	Inadequate
Maine	F	F	Inadequate
Montana	F	F	Inadequate
New Hampshire	F	F	Inadequate
Pennsylvania	F	F	Inadequate
Vermont	F	F	Inadequate
Wisconsin	F	F	Inadequate
Wyoming	F	F	Inadequate

Note: Because reviewers had discretion to add a "+" or "-" to a state's letter grade, some states earned slightly different grades despite receiving identical scores.

II. Introduction

In recent years, concern for the health of American democracy has mounted—and with good reason. Although the costs of polarization and misinformation are hard to quantify, there is little question that they have coarsened and warped our public conversations, and the risks they pose to our system of government are too large for comfort.

Better K-12 education in civics and U.S. History won't solve these problems by itself, yet it's difficult to envision much long-term progress *without* doing better on this front. Tomorrow's problems will be solved—or not—by tomorrow's Americans, including some who are just beginning their formal education. Hence the growing interest in making this the moment when our public schools rekindle the teaching and learning of civics and U.S. History. We see this interest in Congress, in state legislatures and education departments, and in many corners of civil society (for example, the Thomas B. Fordham Institute recently endorsed a bipartisan civics initiative known as Educating for American Democracy, which was itself funded by the Federal Government).

Although there are many ways in which one might seek to improve civics and U.S. History education, the goal of this report is simply to gauge the quality of the standards states have adopted for these subjects in grades K-12 and encourage them to make necessary improvements. Statewide academic standards are just the starting point in the educational process, but they are essential statements of goals and aspirations. They set forth what states *expect* their schools to teach and their students to learn.

As in other subjects, the uses that states then make of their academic standards for civics and U.S. History vary. For example, some states use them as the basis for tests in these subjects, and civics and U.S. History standards for larger states often have implications for what gets included in textbooks. Similarly, standards often influence teacher preparation and professional development programs, as well as the specific curriculum decisions made by districts, schools, and individual teachers.

Standards change with time. Indeed, since Fordham last reviewed state standards for U.S. History in 2011, most states have revised or replaced theirs, and other overhauls are underway today. This creates a golden opportunity to make them better—but also, unfortunately, some chance that they will get worse. Everyone involved in these efforts is contending with much conflict between rival views of the country's past and of what kind of "civics" is most important. But perhaps the most important struggle is between those who are trying to surmount divisions in order to reach some sort of consensus and those who, for whatever reason, feel obliged to pick a side.

The authors of this report favor consensus. We understand and agree that there is more than one way to tell the American story, but if we refuse to compromise, that story may not be told at all.

“The most important struggle is between those who are trying to surmount divisions in order to reach some sort of consensus and those who, for whatever reason, feel obliged to pick a side.”

INTRODUCTION

The Thomas B. Fordham Institute has been reviewing state standards for more than twenty years, including four previous reviews of U.S. History standards. We're slightly ashamed to acknowledge that this is the first time we've examined states' civics standards. Toward that end, we developed criteria for civics standards as we updated our U.S. History criteria (see *Appendix*). Perhaps most notably, in recognition of the broader missions of civics and history education as many view it, we have broadened our conception of "content" to include relevant skills (e.g., "informed advocacy") and dispositions (e.g., "respect for other persons and opinions"), though the bulk of a state's score for "content and rigor" is still based on what it expects students to know or understand (e.g., the causes of the Civil War) and a nontrivial portion of a state's total score and grade is still based on the "organization and clarity" of its standards.

The authors of this report—the review team itself—include both practicing educators and other subject-matter experts (see *Appendix*). Due to the fraught nature of some of the content of these two subjects, which includes everything from the rise of the slave trade to the Supreme Court's interpretation of the Equal Protection Clause, we added a cadre of distinguished external advisers who provided feedback on our review criteria, as well as the draft report.

III. Methods

In the fall of 2019, Fordham Institute staff began reaching out to state departments of education in an effort to identify their most recent social studies standards, and starting in the spring of 2020, reviewers began meeting in person and remotely to discuss the scoring rubric and review criteria (see *Appendix*).

For the purposes of this project, it was agreed that civics and U.S. History should be treated as distinct but overlapping subjects. Accordingly, each state’s social studies standards were reviewed by one civics expert and one U.S. History expert, each of whom focused on the content most relevant to his or her subject—regardless of where it appeared in the standards. For example, some states distribute historical content across various “strands”—even in grades and courses that primarily focus on U.S. History—and, conversely, some courses in “U.S. History and Government” reference Supreme Court cases that are highly relevant to civics.

“It was agreed that civics and U.S. History should be treated as distinct but overlapping subjects.”

As expected, taking this approach meant there was considerable overlap between the content reviewed by the two halves of the team. To address this, once each reviewer had written his or her review, any apparent discrepancies were discussed until they were resolved, a consensus was reached, or it was determined that the disagreement reflected the inherent tensions between the two subjects (for example, an organizational approach that focuses on themes at the expense of chronology may be workable from a civics perspective but is generally undesirable from a U.S. History perspective). It follows that a state’s civics and U.S. History grades may diverge for any number of reasons—though, as a quick glance at the results suggests, many states’ standards are unsatisfactory no matter how one looks at them, while the most well-organized and well-written standards seem to work reasonably well for both disciplines.

All reviews were conducted before May 1, 2021, meaning they don’t reflect subsequent changes that states have made to their standards. In general, any officially sanctioned supplementary documents that provided relevant content guidance were included in the reviews (for example, many states have developed “curriculum frameworks” in addition to their core standards). Illustrative examples were also considered if they were associated with particular standards. However, sample lesson plans or other purely exemplary and/or free-floating documents or links were excluded. Finally, although a state’s grades reflect the quality of its standards, rather than its course requirements or attempts to hold teachers and students accountable for required content, reviewers generally focused their attention on the standards for required courses in U.S. History and Civics, as opposed to electives that didn’t appear to be part of a state’s core social studies sequence.

For the sake of clarity and comparability, we used the same grading scale for civics and U.S. History (see *Appendix*).

IV. Results

As shown in Table 1, five jurisdictions received “exemplary” ratings in both subjects: Alabama, California, Massachusetts, Tennessee, and the District of Columbia (New York’s U.S. History standards were also rated “exemplary,” but its civics standards were rated “good”).

Another ten states were rated “good” in both subjects, and three (Texas, Ohio, and Louisiana) were deemed “good” in one subject but “mediocre” in the other.

Eight states were rated “mediocre” in both subjects, and another four were rated “mediocre” in one subject and “inadequate” in the other.

Finally, twenty states were rated “inadequate,” meaning they received a “D” or “F” in both subjects, including nine states that received a failing grade in both subjects: Delaware, Illinois, Maine, Montana, Pennsylvania, New Hampshire, Vermont, Wisconsin, and Wyoming.

Table 1. Final State Grades and Ratings by Subcategory

STATE	CIVICS				U.S. HISTORY				OVERALL RATING
	Grade	Score			Grade	Score			
		Total	Content & Rigor	Org. & Clarity		Total	Content & Rigor	Org. & Clarity	
Alabama	A-	9	6	3	A-	9	6	3	Exemplary
Alaska	F	2	2	0	F	0	0	0	Inadequate
Arizona	C-	5	4	1	D+	4	3	1	Mediocre/Inadequate
Arkansas	C	5	4	1	C	5	4	1	Mediocre
California	A-	9	6	3	A-	9	6	3	Exemplary
Colorado	D	3	2	1	D	3	2	1	Inadequate
Connecticut	D+	4	3	1	C-	5	4	1	Inadequate/Mediocre
Delaware	F	2	1	1	F	1	1	0	Inadequate

Continued

RESULTS

Table 1. Final State Grades and Ratings by Subcategory *(continued)*

STATE	CIVICS				U.S. HISTORY				OVERALL RATING
	Grade	Score			Grade	Score			
		Total	Content & Rigor	Org. & Clarity		Total	Content & Rigor	Org. & Clarity	
District of Columbia	A-	9	6	3	A-	9	6	3	Exemplary
Florida	B	7	5	2	B	7	5	2	Good
Georgia	B+	8	5	3	B+	8	5	3	Good
Hawaii	C+	6	4	2	C	5	4	1	Mediocre
Idaho	D	3	3	0	F	2	2	0	Inadequate
Illinois	F	2	1	1	F	2	1	1	Inadequate
Indiana	B+	8	5	3	B	7	5	2	Good
Iowa	D	4	2	2	F	2	1	1	Inadequate
Kansas	C-	5	4	1	D+	4	3	1	Mediocre/Inadequate
Kentucky	C	5	4	1	C	5	4	1	Mediocre
Louisiana	C+	6	4	2	B+	8	6	2	Mediocre/Good
Maine	F	2	1	1	F	0	0	0	Inadequate
Maryland	B+	8	6	2	B	7	5	2	Good
Massachusetts	A-	9	6	3	A-	9	6	3	Exemplary
Michigan	B	7	5	2	B	7	5	2	Good
Minnesota	B-	7	5	2	B-	7	5	2	Good
Mississippi	B	7	5	2	B-	7	5	2	Good
Missouri	C	5	4	1	C	5	4	1	Mediocre
Montana	F	2	1	1	F	0	0	0	Inadequate
Nebraska	D	3	2	1	D-	3	2	1	Inadequate
Nevada	D	3	2	1	F	2	1	1	Inadequate
New Hampshire	F	2	1	1	F	2	1	1	Inadequate
New Jersey	C	5	4	1	C	5	4	1	Mediocre
New Mexico	C	5	4	1	C-	5	4	1	Mediocre
New York	B+	8	6	2	A-	9	6	3	Good/Exemplary
North Carolina	D-	3	2	1	F	2	1	1	Inadequate
North Dakota	D+	4	3	1	D+	4	3	1	Inadequate
Ohio	B	7	5	2	C	6	4	2	Good/Mediocre
Oklahoma	B+	8	5	3	B+	8	5	3	Good
Oregon	D-	3	1	2	F	2	1	1	Inadequate
Pennsylvania	F	2	2	0	F	1	1	0	Inadequate
Rhode Island	D	4	3	1	F	1	1	0	Inadequate

Continued

RESULTS

Table 1. Final State Grades and Ratings by Subcategory *(continued)*

STATE	CIVICS				U.S. HISTORY				OVERALL RATING
	Grade	Score			Grade	Score			
		Total	Content & Rigor	Org. & Clarity		Total	Content & Rigor	Org. & Clarity	
South Carolina	B	7	5	2	B	7	5	2	Good
South Dakota	C-	5	4	1	D+	4	3	1	Mediocre/Inadequate
Tennessee	A-	9	6	3	A-	9	6	3	Exemplary
Texas	B+	8	6	2	C+	6	5	1	Good/Mediocre
Utah	C	6	4	2	C	6	4	2	Mediocre
Vermont	F	0	0	0	F	1	1	0	Inadequate
Virginia	B+	8	6	2	B+	8	6	2	Good
Washington	D	3	2	1	D	3	2	1	Inadequate
West Virginia	C	6	4	2	C+	6	4	2	Mediocre
Wisconsin	F	2	1	1	F	2	1	1	Inadequate
Wyoming	F	2	1	1	F	2	1	1	Inadequate

Note: Because reviewers had discretion to add a "+" or "-" to a state's letter grade, some states earned slightly different grades despite receiving identical scores.

V. What Do States With Weak Standards Get Wrong?

Weakness 1. States with weak civics and U.S. History standards provide overbroad, vague, or otherwise insufficient guidance for curriculum and instruction.

For all intents and purposes, at least four states—Alaska, Illinois, Rhode Island, and Vermont—don’t have U.S. History standards. And in at least half a dozen other states, those standards are *barely* detectable. For example, Maine and Wisconsin list eras that students should cover at some point in grades K–12 (e.g., “Meeting of Peoples and Cultures”) but provide no further information beyond the associated date ranges.

More generally, states with weak civics and U.S. History standards are unfortunately attached to broad, vague, and/or nebulous language. For example, Oregon suggests that its high school students “analyze the complexity of the interaction of multiple perspectives to investigate causes and effects of significant events in the development of world, U.S., and Oregon history” (HS.55) but fails to mention any specific event or issue from the twentieth century. Similarly, students in New Hampshire are expected to “evaluate how individuals have developed ideas that have profoundly affected American life, e.g., transcendentalism or relativism” (S:HI:12:3.1).

As those examples suggest, extreme vagueness is often a byproduct of cosmic overbreadth. For example, fifth graders in Vermont must explain “how policies are developed to address public policy problems” (D2.Civ.13.3-5), while those in North Dakota “describe the structure of government and how it functions to serve citizens/residents (e.g., Constitution, Amendments, and government leaders)” (C.3_5.2). Similarly, eighth graders in South Dakota learn “how government decisions impact people, places, and history” (6.C.1.2).

Alas, cramming multiple branches or levels of government into a single, perfunctory, and typically ill-conceived standard doesn’t necessarily make it more specific or actionable. For example, Montana’s fourth graders are expected to “describe how rules, laws, and policies are implemented by local, state, national, and tribal governments” (SS.CG.4.3) while Wyoming’s fifth-grade teachers must inculcate “the basic local, tribal, state, and national political processes (e.g., campaigning and voting)” (SS5.1.2). As in U.S. History, the net effect of such statements in at least half a dozen jurisdictions is a near total failure to specify any specific civics content.

Weakness 2. States with weak civics and U.S. History standards omit or seriously underemphasize topics that are essential to informed citizenship.

Even when states attempt to identify the specific content that students should learn, the results can be patchy—and some essential topics are particularly likely to be omitted or seriously underemphasized.

Specifically, in many states' civics standards,

- **The three branches of the federal government** are covered by a single, all-encompassing standard, even in high school;
- **Federalism** is omitted entirely or appears in a laundry list of constitutional “principles” instead of receiving its own, discrete, nuanced standard(s);
- **Due process** appears in a laundry list (or is implicated in a Supreme Court case) but doesn’t get its own standard(s);
- **Electoral process** receives overbroad or incomplete coverage that fails to explicitly reference topics such as primary elections, gerrymandering, campaign finance, and voter access;
- **Equal protection** receives implicit coverage in U.S. History (e.g., in standards on the Reconstruction Amendments) but is inexplicably omitted from the aforementioned lists of “principles”; and
- **Comparative government** is overlooked—especially in high school—despite the fact that studying parliamentary systems, alternatives to “first-past-the-post” elections, and non-constitutional provides students with critical perspective on the American system.

Similarly, the following topics and/or periods in U.S. History are particularly likely to suffer from problematic gaps in coverage:

- **The early Colonial period (1660s–1750s)** including the rise of colonial legislatures and the slave trade, both of which may be overlooked or underemphasized in states where the Colonial era is only covered at the elementary level;
- **Key events in the early republic (1790s)** including the foundational precedents of the Washington presidency, the first party schism, and the momentous election of 1800 (though most states do cover the ratification of the Bill of Rights);
- **Westward expansion, the Marshall Court, and the sectional schism** including the Louisiana Purchase, Mexican-American War, Missouri Compromise, and Kansas-Nebraska Act, as well as *Marbury v. Madison*, *McCullough v. Maryland*, and *Gibbons v. Ogden*;
- **The World War I era** including reasons for American involvement, suppression of domestic dissent, Wilson’s “Fourteen Points,” and divisions over the League of Nations; and
- **The entire post-1970 era** including the social and economic divisions of the 1970s, the rise of Reagan and the New Right, the end of the Cold War, social and economic globalization, terrorism and the Internet, and conflicts over hot-button issues such as immigration and healthcare.

Finally, some historically underrepresented groups are better represented than others, although there is evidence of progress on many fronts (see *E Pluribus Unum?*).

E Pluribus Unum?

How to balance the *unum* and *pluribus* of our history has been debated seemingly forever, but those debates have heated up in recent months, as America has reckoned with racial injustice and inequity even as it has tried to grapple with a dreadful pandemic.

So how are states doing on this front—and other less volatile but still active fronts?

In general, states' treatment of slavery, Jim Crow, and other Black history essentials has improved since Fordham's 2011 review of U.S. History standards; however, the manner in which some states are handling these issues still leaves something to be desired. For example, thanks to revisions made in 2018, Texas's fifth grade standards now list slavery as the first cause of the Civil War. Yet because Texas organizes its social studies standards into nine "strands," both the rise of slavery and the slave trade are troublingly housed under "Economics," where a separate standard asks students to celebrate the "benefits of the U.S. free enterprise system through 1877." Also less than satisfactory is the reference in some states' standards to "states' rights" as a cause of the Civil War without adequately contextualizing the term as the claimed right of slave states to perpetuate and expand their "peculiar institution."

Meanwhile, a few states have embraced virtue-signaling at the expense of substance. For example, Oregon suggests that its high school students:

Analyze the impact of the use of slavery and other exploitative labor systems (e.g., indenture, peonage, convict leasing, sharecropping, bracero program, migrant labor, Chinese immigrants labor, contemporary prison labor) on the development of the U.S. infrastructure, wage-competition, trade, and standards of living in local, state, and global markets (HS.17).

Besides being a ridiculously cosmic and nebulous standard, this is the *only* reference to slavery in the Oregon high school standards, though sixth grade students are also expected to "Identify and analyze the causes and effects of oppression and resistance in the living histories of historically marginalized groups in the Western Hemisphere" (6.20).

Still, many states now have a reasonable handle on the issue of race and don't downplay its significance. To wit, the word "slavery" appears twenty-eight times in the Tennessee standards. Georgia explicitly references the suppression of Reconstruction-era black office-holding. Mississippi devotes an entire "strand" to Civil Rights. And the District of Columbia (where Black students still account for a larger share of the student population than in any state) offers perhaps the country's most thorough treatment of Black History.

In general, states with more detailed standards mention the Three-Fifths Clause, *Dred Scott*, the Reconstruction Amendments, *Brown v. Board of Education*, and landmark Civil Rights legislation, though they are somewhat more likely to omit or underemphasize the rise of the slave trade, the erosion of black voting rights in the late nineteenth century, and the Twenty-fourth Amendment (among other topics).

Similarly, coverage of early Native American history is reasonably strong in many states. For example, most devote significant bandwidth to native cultures in early grades, and those with sufficiently specific standards usually mention the Trail of Tears and the Dawes Act; however, there is less coverage of more recent developments such as the Indian Civil Rights Act.

Indeed, some version of this pattern can be detected for almost every group. For example, most states with detailed standards mention the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, the internment of Japanese-Americans during World War II, and *Korematsu v. United States*. Yet there is little that could be described as Asian-American History post-World War II. (For example, no state mentions Vincent Chin, whose murder launched the modern Asian-American movement.)

E Pluribus Unum? (continued)

Nor is there much Latino American History, although some states do mention Cesar Chavez, the Bracero program, or the United Farm Workers. For example, only a handful of states reference *Hernandez v. Texas*, which found that intentionally excluding Mexicans from a jury in a trial where the defendant was a Mexican violated the Equal Protection Clause. And few states mention the controversy over Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA).

Suffice to say, most states should do more on at least some of these fronts, though that's the case for nearly every subject, given the lack of detail in too many standards. Still, at a time when the debate over U.S. History is more polarized than ever, it's encouraging that more than a handful of states—both red and blue—have standards that get it mostly right.

Weakness 3. States with weak civics or U.S. History standards make poor use of early grades or fail to revisit essential content in later grades.

As noted, at least a dozen states have such nebulous or nonexistent expectations that it's hard to say what sort of history or civics is expected in any specific grade level. Yet even the somewhat larger group of states with reasonably specific standards can suffer from a lack of ambition. For example, Hawaii makes almost no attempt to cover traditional civics content until fifth grade, while Ohio inexplicably waits until eighth grade to begin its single pass through U.S. History.

In general, the vague and/or ahistorical references that many states offer in early grades are a missed opportunity for young learners eager to soak up historical content in the form of age-appropriate stories, biographies, and events. Meanwhile, about half of states settle for an incomplete U.S. History course in elementary school (e.g., by covering everything through the Constitutional Convention or the Civil War). Even if one takes the view that U.S. History cannot be taught in a single year, this is hard to understand. After all, states have at least six years of elementary school to work with, and the overwhelming majority don't tackle World History until middle school.

Regardless of the history sequence, from a civics perspective, the key question is how well states manage to integrate essential civics content into the U.S., world, and state histories that are typically taught in grades 4–8, where opportunities for civics learning are often missed. For example, states may or may not connect the Greeks, the Romans, Magna Carta, or the Enlightenment to the American system of government. Similarly, although most states distinguish between democracies and dictatorships, most circumnavigate the globe without asking students to distinguish between parliamentary and presidential systems, constitutional and non-constitutional systems, or unitary, federal, and confederal systems. Finally, many states miss clear opportunities for civics learning in their own state history. For example, the Kansas standards make no mention of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, though they do mention *Brown v. Topeka Board of Education*.

Unfortunately, states' high school civics standards are sometimes even weaker than their elementary and middle school standards. For example, the state of Washington covers the three branches of government in a reasonably clear fifth-grade standard but says nothing about them (or almost any other U.S. Government related topic) in high school, where students are expected to “analyze the impact of constitutions, laws, treaties, and international agreements on the maintenance of national and international order” (C3.11-12.2).

“At least a dozen states have such nebulous or nonexistent expectations that it's hard to say what sort of history or civics is expected in any specific grade level.”

Similarly, if less egregiously, the flaws in many states' U.S. History sequences have important implications for high school as well as elementary school. To wit, at least fifteen states make just one pass through U.S. History—typically across grades 5, 8, and 11—thus relegating the entire Colonial period (and, in some cases, the Founding era) to elementary school.

Finally, although the reviews in this report only consider the quality of states' standards (as opposed to their broader social studies policies), at least a dozen states don't specifically require high school courses in civics or U.S. History (see *How Many States Don't Require U.S. History or Civics Courses in High School?*). Unsurprisingly, most of these states also have terrible civics and U.S. History standards for grades 9–12. And of course, if one is at all serious about these subjects, it is an indefensible policy.

Weakness 4. States with weak civics or U.S. History standards take an overly rigid or needlessly complex approach to organization.

The vast majority of states organize their social studies standards into “strands” (or the functional equivalent), which typically include subjects such as geography and economics in addition to history and civics. This approach is defensible in early grades, which typically don't focus on any specific history or discipline (and which typically devote far too little curricular energy to social studies). However, it becomes increasingly problematic as the grade level increases.

Scattering what should be related historical content across multiple strands in grades or courses that primarily focus on U.S. History interferes with chronological reasoning and strips the affected content items of necessary historical context. For example, if the Articles of Confederation are housed in “history” and the Constitutional Convention is housed in “civics,” it may be less clear that the former came first and directly informed the events of the latter. This creates real problems in grades 4–8, which are often organized around specific periods of state, national, or world history. But what is truly inexplicable is the fact that many states organize their *high school* standards into strands—in some cases, despite the fact that courses such as U.S. History and Civics are specifically required for graduation. For example, in addition to standards for “history,” Texas's high school U.S. History course includes standards for “government,” “citizenship,” “economics,” “geography,” “culture,” and “science, technology, and society.”

How Many States Don't Require U.S. History or Civics Courses in High School?

By our count, as many as ten states don't specifically require that high school students take any civics or U.S. History coursework to graduate high school—an unfortunate indication of the value they place on informed citizenship. Of the states in this group, the three that are most clearly delinquent are Montana, Pennsylvania, and Vermont. Five other states—Kentucky, Nebraska, Rhode Island, Wisconsin, and Wyoming—require coursework in “social studies” that theoretically includes civics and/or U.S. History content. However, because these states don't specify the number of units of civics or social studies (and because they organize their high school standards by “strand” rather than by course) no civics or U.S. History content is associated with any specific high school social studies course. Finally, Massachusetts and Minnesota organize their high school social studies standards by course but don't specifically require that students earn credits in U.S. History or Civics to graduate high school (though at least in Massachusetts' case, there is a *de facto* U.S. History requirement).

In addition to these states, there are also a handful of jurisdictions with decidedly weak course requirements. For example, Maine requires one credit in American history *and* government, while Colorado requires one course that covers state *and* national history *and* government—which is too much to ask of any single course or teacher. Finally, despite the recent passage of legislation mandating a semester of Civics, Oregon still doesn't require any U.S. History.

Obviously, many districts and schools in these states do require (or strongly encourage) coursework in civics and U.S. History. But civics and U.S. History aren't essential subjects for *many* Americans. They are essential subjects for *every* American.

In general, the problems associated with strand-based organization are more severe in states that insist on dividing their strands into substrands (which are sometimes called “anchor” standards, among other labels) that appear for every grade level or band—particularly if the state feels obliged to “check the box” and/or articulate a progression for every substrand. For example, the wording of many Rhode Island civics and government standards is needlessly awkward because the state insists on using the same handful of sentence stems for every grade band, while Idaho insists on informing the reader *every* time there are *no* grade-level objectives for a particular civics and government or history “goal” (with the result that the words “no objectives at this grade level” appear eighty times in a sixty-page document). Finally, Maine repeats the same six civics and government standards for each elementary grade with very slight changes in wording, making impossible to tell what’s actually expected for any specific grade.

Weakness 5. States with weak civics and U.S. History standards pay little attention to writing, argumentation, problem analysis, and the connections between core content and current issues and events.

In general, states pay too little attention to writing and argumentation. Indeed, many states’ skills or practices standards make no explicit reference to written presentation. For example, high school students in Iowa are expected to “present adaptations of arguments and explanations that feature evocative ideas and perspectives on issues and topics to reach a range of audiences and venues outside the classroom using print and oral technologies and digital technologies” (SS.9-12.9).

Other states set exceedingly low expectations. For example, high school students in New Hampshire are expected to “investigate how knowledgeable and engaged citizens have acted to preserve and extend their liberties, e.g., writing letters to the editor or participating in town meetings” (SS:CV:12:4.2). Even when letters to the editor were worth writing, the average letter was less than 250 words (and there is no indication that anything longer is expected).

Regardless of the rationale, it’s a mistake to neglect writing, as learning to think logically and communicate clearly—and, in particular, to argue from *evidence* rather than expressing an uninformed opinion—is essential to informed citizenship. And from a civics perspective, it’s particularly frustrating that many states seem to view efforts to promote civic participation and academic rigor as mutually exclusive.

In fact, taking the time to research an issue and organize one’s thoughts is a hallmark of *informed* participation, and harnessing students’ interest in current issues and events is one of the best ways to encourage them to read, write, and think more deeply.

“Many states seem to view efforts to promote civic participation and academic rigor as mutually exclusive.”

VI. What Do States With Exemplary Standards Get Right?

Strength 1. Exemplary civics and U.S. History standards effectively articulate what every American should know about this country’s democratic institutions, traditions, and history.

Without exception, states with “exemplary” civics and U.S. History standards take a systematic approach to building students’ knowledge of America’s history, traditions, and democratic institutions (though they often use words like “understand,” “explain,” or “describe” instead of “know”). Furthermore, a close examination of the contents of these state standards reveals a surprising degree of consensus about what knowledge is essential. For example, fifth graders in Alabama are expected to

“Describe colonial economic life and labor systems in the Americas, recognizing centers of slave trade in the Western Hemisphere and the establishment of the Triangular Trade Route” (5.6).

Similarly, Tennessee third graders are expected to

“Identify the economic, political, and religious reasons for founding the Thirteen Colonies and the role of indentured servitude and slavery in their settlement” (3.27).

Both of these standards are admirably substantive, specific, and straightforward (and both address the rise of the slave trade, among other topics).

Similarly, consider the following Tennessee and Massachusetts standards, which are drawn from their respective high school U.S. History courses.

“Describe the competition between the U.S. and the Soviet Union in arms development, economic dominance, and ideology, including the roles of NATO, SEATO, and the Warsaw Pact” (Tennessee; US.59).

“Explain what communism is as an economic system and analyze the sources of Cold War conflict; on a political map of the world, locate the areas of Cold War conflict between the U.S. and the Soviet Union in the 1950s to the 1980s” (Massachusetts; USII.T3.10).

Like the first two examples, these standards aren’t identical, and in a federal system that gives the national government little say in education, we shouldn’t expect them to be—yet they are mining almost the same vein of knowledge, and each is clear and specific in its way.

Finally, consider the following twelfth-grade civics standards, which were adopted by the state of Alabama and the District of Columbia:

“Explain historical and philosophical origins that shaped the government of the United States, including the Magna Carta, the Petition of Rights, the English Bill of Rights, the Mayflower Compact, the Virginia Declaration of Rights, and the influence of Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Charles de Montesquieu, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and the Great Awakening” (Alabama; twelfth-grade U.S. Government, Standard 1).

“Analyze the influence of ancient Greek, Roman, English, and leading European political thinkers such as John Locke, Charles-Louis Montesquieu, Niccolò Machiavelli, and William Blackstone on the development of American government” (District of Columbia; 12.1.1).

Like the first four examples, these last two standards focus on specific and broadly similar content, again highlighting the rough consensus that exists among states with “exemplary” civics and U.S. History standards when it comes to “essential” knowledge.

Strength 2. Exemplary civics and U.S. History standards emphasize skills that are essential to informed citizenship such as critical thinking, problem analysis, and evaluating, interpreting, and arguing from evidence.

In addition to taking a systematic approach to building core knowledge, every state with “exemplary” civics and/or U.S. History standards is serious about skills development. For example, by the time California students leave elementary school, they are expected to know the difference between relevant and irrelevant information, cause and effect, and cost and benefit—all essential components of critical thinking—and by the end of eighth grade, they are also expected to know the difference between cause and correlation, recognize the influence of interest and point of view, and understand the role of chance and error in human affairs. (For more on the link between tolerance for uncertainty and critical thinking, see *Curbing Confirmation Bias*).

Often, state standards include a skills progression that is parallel to (though not necessarily separate from) the core content standards. For example, first graders in New York (which has an unusually strong set of “social studies practices”)⁷ are expected to “identify the creator and/or author of different forms of evidence” (1.A.3), while eighth-grade students are expected to “analyze evidence in terms of historical and/or social context, content, authorship, point of view, purpose, and format; identify bias; explain the role of bias, context and audience in presenting arguments or evidence” (7.A.3).

In addition to such progressions, some states embed specific skills-building exercises in their content standards (though this is more common in civics than U.S. History). For example, students in Massachusetts’ high school government course are expected to conduct not one but three research projects—one on a public policy that is impacting the local community, one on a significant world political issue, and one on whether and how the Constitution is relevant in the twenty-first century.

Finally, some sort of skills development is implicit in the wording of most “content” standards. For example, Tennessee’s eighth graders are expected to “compare and contrast the points of view of Loyalists and Patriots” (8.19), while high school students in the District of Columbia are expected to “evaluate the effects of the Court’s interpretations of the Constitution in *Marbury v. Madison*, *McCulloch v. Maryland*, and *United States v. Nixon*, with emphasis on the arguments espoused by each side in these cases” (12.4.3).

As these examples suggest, there is no bright line between “skills development” and factual knowledge. After all, students can’t compare and contrast Loyalists and Patriots if they don’t know the difference between them, nor is it possible to “evaluate the effects” of a Supreme Court case without knowing a great deal of subsequent U.S. History. In short, most essential social studies skills have little meaning in an information vacuum—meaning, they are impossible to demonstrate without significant background

“There is no bright line between “skills development” and factual knowledge.”

7. “New York State K–12 Social Studies Framework,” 2017, <http://www.nysed.gov/curriculum-instruction/k-12-social-studies-framework>

knowledge (for example, students are unlikely to “identify bias” in primary sources from the Revolutionary era if they don’t know about the Loyalists and Patriots). In other words, there is a sense in which any standards that focus on students’ knowledge of core content are also *skills* standards, which is why states with “exemplary” social studies standards invariably organize them around the essentials of American history and government rather than abstract skillsets.

Curbing Confirmation Bias

Many observers blame “confirmation bias”—the tendency to seek, cite, and favor information in a way that confirms or supports one’s prior beliefs or values—for the growing polarization and misinformation that plague American politics. (Also to blame are deepening racial and cultural divisions, increasingly sophisticated gerrymandering, and the algorithmic feedback loops embedded in many search engines and social media platforms.) In the direst versions of this story, liberals and conservatives don’t just disagree; they inhabit fundamentally different realities, each with its preferred set of “facts” and unassailable truths.

Although there is no surefire way to guard against “confirmation bias,” an essential first step is to ensure that young people gain awareness of its existence and the role it may play in their own thinking.

To our knowledge, no state currently includes in its social studies standards the metacognitive ability to critique one’s own thinking and understanding of the facts, although Michigan does mention “confirmation bias” in one of its standards. But shouldn’t such an expectation be included going forward? At minimum, it’s likely to encourage a measure of intellectual humility, which is too often missing from what passes for civic discourse in this country.⁸

Strength 3. Exemplary civics and U.S. History standards champion essential civic dispositions such as respect for other persons and opinions, an inclination to serve, and a commitment to American institutions and ideals.

Exemplary civics and U.S. History standards tend to focus on three essential civic dispositions:

- 1. Respect for other persons and opinions**
- 2. An inclination to learn, participate, and serve**
- 3. A commitment to American institutions and ideals**

For example, New York’s “social studies practices” include the expectation that K–8 students “demonstrate respect for the rights of others...regardless of whether one agrees with the other viewpoints” (1.F.1). Similarly, Tennessee’s high school civics course includes the expectation that students “describe what should be reasonably expected from any citizen or resident of the U.S. and explain why it is important for the well-being of the nation,” followed by a bullet-pointed list that includes being informed on civic issues, obeying the law, paying taxes, volunteering and performing public service, respecting the rights of others, serving as a juror, and voting (GC.31).

Like skills development, the cultivation of civics dispositions is often implicit rather than explicit. For example, every set of “exemplary” civics and U.S. History standards includes a long list of historical role models in early grades. Thus, Kindergarteners in California learn about Benjamin Franklin and Booker T. Washington, among other noteworthy individuals, while second graders in Alabama learn about Harriet Tubman and Harriet Beecher Stowe, among other noteworthy female figures.

8. Grobman, Kevin H., “Confirmation Bias: A class activity adapted from Wason’s 2-4-6 Hypothesis Rule Discovery Task,” DevPsy, http://www.DevPsy.org/teaching/method/confirmation_bias.html.

Some civic dispositions are habitual, meaning they should be practiced as well as preached, which is why the strongest civics standards insist on students' active participation. For example, first graders in Alabama and California are expected to practice voting, while District of Columbia high school students "take and defend" positions on "the scope and limits of rights and obligations as democratic citizens" (12.8) and New York students in every grade level are expected to "participate in activities that focus on a classroom, school, community, state, or national issue or problem" (7.F.2). Still, even "exemplary" states differ when it comes to requiring specific disposition-focused activities. For example, California devotes an entire appendix to the features of successful service-learning projects (but doesn't require them), while Massachusetts (in addition to asking its high school civics students to research and write papers on issues of local and global concern) expects every high school student to complete a "civic action" project.

We understand that current opinions differ on the topic of "action civics." We observe only that knowledge, skills, and dispositions are supposed to add up to informed and responsible citizenship, which for many Americans incorporates various forms of participation in the civic and political lives of their communities, states, and nation.

Strength 4. Exemplary civics and U.S. History standards make effective use of elementary and middle school and require at least one year of U.S. History and one semester of Civics in high school.

Most of the states with the strongest civics and U.S. History standards take an ambitious approach to both subjects in the elementary years. For example, Tennessee expects its first graders to explain the roles of the President, governor, and mayor, distinguish between rules and laws, and understand that voting is a way of making decisions, and second graders learn about their federal and state constitutions, the three branches of government, and the different paths to citizenship. Similarly, California introduces students to representative government in first grade, the lawmaking process in second grade, and the three branches of government and federalism in third grade.

In addition to these nuts and bolts, every state with "exemplary" standards features a panoply of admirable historical figures in the early grades, thus beginning the lengthy process of packing students' brains with essential historical content, while also implicitly cultivating essential civic dispositions. Still, there is no substitute for *bona fide* U.S. History. Of the six jurisdictions that earned an A- for U.S. History, five devote at least one year of elementary school to U.S. History⁹ and three—Alabama, Tennessee, and the District of Columbia—devote two years to a full introductory course. Specifically, Alabama devotes fifth and sixth grade to U.S. History, the District devotes fourth and fifth grade to U.S. History, and Tennessee begins its two-year pass in the second half of third grade and finishes halfway through fifth grade.

“Every state with “exemplary” standards features a panoply of admirable historical figures in the early grades.”

Why start them so early? We see three compelling reasons: First, studies show that reading comprehension is strongly linked to background knowledge.¹⁰ In other words, students read better when they have some basic understanding of the subject matter, and they may even acquire new vocabulary more quickly when they are in a better position to infer its meaning from the context. And of course, both fiction and nonfiction are stuffed with references and allusions to U.S. History and civics content—from Thomas Jefferson to the Civil Right movement—which may explain why recent research suggests that elementary students' English language arts performance improves more quickly when they spend more time on social studies.¹¹

9. The only exception is New York, which offers a two-year course in middle school and a one-year course in "U.S. History and Government" in high school.

10. Smith, Reid, et al. "The Role of Background Knowledge in Reading Comprehension: A Critical Review." *Reading Psychology* 42.3 (2021): 214-240.

11. Tyner, Adam and Sarah Kabourek, *Social Studies Instruction and Reading Comprehension: Evidence from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study*, (Washington DC: Thomas B. Fordham Institute), <https://fordhaminstitute.org/national/resources/social-studies-instruction-and-reading-comprehension>.

Second, students need effective scaffolding in both civics and U.S. History. After all, it's hard to understand the role of federal agencies if one doesn't already understand the role of the President, the separation of powers, and the distinction between local, state, and federal governments. That much content cannot all be crammed into a single high school course, especially the kind that lasts just one semester, nor is it likely that students will absorb everything the first time they are exposed to it, which is why multiple passes over the most essential content are particularly advisable.

Finally, at a purely normative level, it's incredibly important for students to internalize what it means to be an American from an early age. And it's incredibly important that our public education system help children understand both the *pluribus* and the *unum* (see *What Should Accountability Look Like for Civics and U.S. History?*).

In general, states with "exemplary" civics standards see the middle grades as an opportunity, regardless of whether they devote those grades to world history, national history, state history, or civics as such. For example, Massachusetts has a strong eighth-grade civics course, New York's two-year middle school U.S. History sequence is full of landmark Supreme Court cases and notable pieces of legislation, and seventh graders in the District of Columbia are expected to "explain the government of the Roman Republic and its significance (e.g., written constitution, separation of powers, rule of law, representative government, the notion of civic duty, and checks and balances" (7.9.3).

In addition to taking an aggressive approach to civics in grades K–8, all five states that earn an "exemplary" rating in civics outline a semester-long high school course in Civics and/or U.S. Government (though in Massachusetts' case, that course is inexplicably listed as an elective).

Similarly, in addition to making a full pass through U.S. History in elementary/middle school, five of the six "exemplary" jurisdictions make another full pass in eighth grade and/or high school and four—Alabama, Massachusetts, Tennessee, and the District of Columbia—also devote two of these years to U.S. History. In other words, four of the six exemplary jurisdictions outline two full courses in U.S. History,¹² as do at least half a dozen other states with somewhat weaker content coverage.

What Should Accountability Look Like for Civics and U.S. History?

Because the goals of civic education include things like "critical thinking" and "the capacity for civic discourse," the task of holding schools or students accountable for civics and U.S. History content must be approached with caution. And yet, if we truly want better results, then we can't allow our chronic neglect of these disciplines to continue.

Imagine, just for a moment, what would happen if fifth and eighth grade students were quizzed on the three branches of government and the Bill of Rights, the causes of the Revolutionary War and Civil War, the significance of the Great Depression and World War II, and the methods and results of the Civil Rights Movement (among other things). Wouldn't more of them enter high school with the kind of basic information that would allow them to succeed in the civics and U.S. History material they encountered there?

And now imagine that, in *addition* to taking courses in civics and U.S. History, every high school senior was required to write a capstone paper on the history of a current social or political problem, the costs and benefits of potential solutions to it, and possible means of addressing it—for example, through legislation or advocacy. Wouldn't we, in time, find ourselves with more adults who understand the basic workings of American democracy and the meaning of citizenship within that democracy?

Ultimately, learning can be demonstrated in many different ways. But one way or another, we must coax a clearer and more sustained focus on civics and U.S. History learning out of our overburdened education system, so that more students emerge from it with the requisite knowledge, skills, and dispositions.

12. The two exceptions are Massachusetts (which covers the first half of U.S. History in fifth grade) and California (which offers a single course across fifth grade, eighth grade, and eleventh grade).

Strength 5: Exemplary civics and U.S. History standards are well organized, clearly written, and user-friendly.

In addition to effectively articulating what students should know about their country, emphasizing essential skills and dispositions, and doing what they can to maximize civics and U.S. History coverage, every jurisdiction that earns an “exemplary” rating has admirably well-organized, clearly written, and user-friendly standards.

More specifically, every “exemplary” state offers a separate content outline for each individual grade K–8, as well as each individual high school course. However, within those outlines, states with exemplary standards tend to keep things simple, meaning they have two to three organizational layers instead of ten (see the “weaknesses” for more on strands).

Furthermore, every “exemplary” state organizes its standards based on the internal logic of the content that grade or course is meant to cover. Specifically, every “exemplary” state organizes the contents of its history-focused grades and courses chronologically while taking a more thematic and flexible approach to civics. In practice, this often means embedding most K–8 civics content in the largely chronological organization of whatever state, national, and world histories are covered in these grades, rather than splitting what should be related content between multiple “strands” or “substrands.”

In addition to being well organized, “exemplary” standards are free of unnecessary jargon and are simply well written—a condition that requires a deceptive amount of time and effort if one is committed to reinventing every wheel but that would be considerably more attainable if states were more willing to learn from one another.

Finally, most “exemplary” states have user-friendly standards documents and websites (though even the states in this group have room for improvement on this front). For a sense of what’s possible if capacity is no object, see the webpage that presents California’s extensive but accessible Curriculum Framework.

“Every “exemplary” state organizes the contents of its history-focused grades and courses chronologically.”

VII. Recommendations for States

Recommendation 1. Maximize civics and U.S. History coverage in elementary and middle school and require at least one year of U.S. History and one semester of Civics in high school.

Although there is more than one defensible K–8 sequence, there is no reason to let these grades go to waste. After all, many states already devote grades 1–3 to the basics of local and state government, grades 4 and/or 5 to a first pass through U.S. History (and the associated civics), grades 6 and 7 to World History and/or geography (and the basics of comparative politics), and eighth grade to some or all of U.S. History and/or a deeper look at core civics topics.

Similarly, most states already require at least one year of U.S. History and one semester to civics. And frankly, given the volume of content that teachers are expected to cover, there’s a strong case for two years of U.S. History, followed by a full year of civics in twelfth grade.

Finally, although some otherwise exemplary states have adopted alternative sequences, there is no reason why students cannot make two full passes through U.S. History during their thirteen years of public education—one in elementary school and another in higher grades. After all, more than a dozen states already offer such a sequence, and most still manage to do justice to world history, state history, economics, and geography, as well as civics.

Recommendation 2. Provide more specific and detailed guidance in both subjects.

Standards that are too broad or vague are effectively contentless. So, in general, we encourage states to be as specific as possible. In practice, this usually means writing substantially more content standards that focus on significantly narrower and more tractable topics. However, it may also mean listing the specific elements that are required instead of assuming that they can or will be inferred—or perhaps including some well-chosen examples in parentheses (e.g., specific Supreme Court cases or acts of Congress).

In addition to writing more useful standards, states that haven’t yet done so should also strongly consider developing curriculum frameworks or other supplementary documents that provide additional detail, explanation, and context. Ideally, such documents would take an expository approach similar to that taken by California’s current Curriculum Framework and South Carolina’s outstanding but unfortunately defunct Support Documents.

Recommendation 3. Put more emphasis on writing, argumentation, and the connections between core content and current events.

Many states' current social studies standards make shockingly few references to written presentation.¹³ Regardless of the rationale, this is a mistake, as learning to write thoughtfully and coherently—and, in particular, to argue from evidence rather than expressing an uninformed opinion—is essential to informed and engaged citizenship (as well as most career paths).

Of course, well-conceived writing assignments look a little different in civics classes (where connecting the core content to current events is a must) and U.S. History classes (where the focus is obviously on the past), but ultimately the goals of such assignments overlap insofar as they encourage students to know deeply and think critically in addition to feeling strongly. Consequently, if we could require only one specific exercise, it would be to have twelfth-grade civics students use their knowledge of American history and government to research and analyze the historical roots of and continuing reasons for a current social or political problem, the costs and benefits of proposed solutions to that problem, and possible means of addressing it—and then make the written case for a specific course of action.

Recommendation 4. Take a simpler, more flexible, and more user-friendly approach to organization.

In general, states that rely too heavily on “strands” or “anchor standards” would do well to ditch these unnecessary organizational layers, especially in their outlines for higher grade levels and/or high school courses, and let the contents of each individual grade level or course dictate its organization. In particular, states should organize content chronologically in grades and courses that focus on U.S. History to avoid scattering or fragmenting what should be related content or stripping individual content items of historical context (which is almost always necessary to understanding an individual or event).

Recommendation 5. Address specific oversights and/or gaps in coverage, per the individual state reviews.

As noted, all but a handful of states have significant gaps in their civics and/or U.S. History coverage (and even the best standards have room for improvement). Although the specific details vary by state, these gaps should not be overlooked. Indeed, most readers will find that at least one of the state-specific recommendations that appear at the end of their state's individual profile addresses the most glaring holes in its standards.

¹³ In theory, many states have adopted the Common Core Standards for History/Social Studies, which include numerous references to written presentation; however, these objectively strong standards are seldom integrated into states' social studies standards or standards documents.

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Connecticut.....	78	Minnesota.....	184	South Carolina.....	289
Delaware.....	84	Mississippi.....	190	South Dakota.....	296
District of Columbia.....	90	Missouri.....	196	Tennessee.....	304
Florida.....	96	Montana.....	202	Texas.....	311
Georgia.....	103	Nebraska.....	207	Utah.....	320
Hawaii.....	109	Nevada.....	213	Vermont.....	327
Idaho.....	116	New Hampshire.....	219	Virginia.....	331
Illinois.....	121	New Jersey.....	224	Washington.....	338
Indiana.....	126	New Mexico.....	232	West Virginia.....	344
Iowa.....	133	New York.....	239	Wisconsin.....	352
Kansas.....	139	North Carolina.....	246	Wyoming.....	357

Alabama

A	Exemplary	10
	Standards worthy of implementation	9
B	Good	8
	Targeted revisions recommended	7
C	Mediocre	6
	Significant revisions strongly recommended	5
D	Inadequate	4
		3
F	Complete revision recommended before implementation	2
		0-1

Civics: A-

Content & Rigor: 6/7

Clarity & Organization: 3/3

Total Score: 9/10

U.S. History: A-

Content & Rigor: 6/7

Clarity & Organization: 3/3

Total Score: 9/10

Overview

Alabama’s civics and U.S. History standards are exemplary. Recent developments in American society and the world may suggest revisions, but care should be taken not to harm the many virtues of the current standards, which are already worthy of implementation.

Description of the Standards

Alabama’s “Course of Study: Social Studies” is organized by grade level for every grade from Kindergarten through twelfth. The content in each grade is divided into four strands: economics, geography, history, and civics and government, but the emphasis these receive varies by grade. The standards for each grade consist of numbered paragraphs for key content areas, indented bullet points for sub-topics, clarifying examples that can be used in instruction, and a box indicating the strand. An Alabama map icon appears after any text that relates specifically to the state.

The standards begin with a general introduction that outlines the goals of social studies, and before each cluster of grades (K-2, 3-4, 5-6, 7-8, and 9-12), there is an overview that outlines the main objectives to be met for the grades in question. The standards conclude with a set of appendices that include standards for a course on “Contemporary World Issues and Civic Engagement” (Appendix A), history related process skills (Appendix B), and social studies reading and writing standards for grades 6-8, 9-10, and 11-12 (Appendix C).

Civics: A-

In Brief

Alabama’s civics standards are excellent overall, and they deserve special praise for the repeated messages that facts are important, history contains lessons for today, and the goal of civics is to produce informed citizens who will do their part to help our country realize its founding ideals.

Content and Rigor: 6/7

K-8

The knowledge that Alabama students are expected to gain before high school is, with a few exceptions noted below, comprehensive and well sequenced. For example, Kindergarten uses community figures with whom students are familiar to provide a framework for their lives—rules, safety, problems, hopes—and introduces national holidays. First and second grades introduce role models from Alabama and American history, and third grade adds the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution.

This sets the stage for three years of history, one for Alabama and two for the United States, which are also well done. However, from a civics standpoint, the fourth grade standard for explaining Alabama’s secession from the Union is unbalanced (content standard 8). (In addition to the Articles of Confederation, the standards should discuss the structure of the nation under the Constitution, which applied in 1861 and was interpreted to bar secession.) And the fifth and sixth grade courses miss some easy opportunities to tie history to civics. For example, in discussing the causes of the Civil War, the fate of the League of Nations, and the New Deal, the standards could cite the powers of Congress to create new states, approve treaties, and regulate interstate commerce.

The goals of the one-semester class “Civics” in seventh grade are worthy but unrealistic. Students are expected to understand the influence on American government of four periods in Western history and seven political thinkers, compare American government to six other forms of government (Civics, content standards 1–3), and then understand the structure, funding, and functions of the

federal and Alabama state governments, along with political parties and elections (Civics, content standards 4,5,12). These goals come before an economics unit with equally ambitious goals and a citizenship unit in which students examine the social and economic conditions of the United States in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, identify contemporary issues, and determine how the country can be improved. To relieve the seventh-grade civics course of some of this burden (and to avoid repetition), thought should be given to shifting the contributions of Judeo-Christianity, classical Greece, and republican Rome to eighth-grade world history, and the study of Hobbes, Locke, Montesquieu, Voltaire, and Rousseau to ninth-grade world history or tenth-grade U.S. History.

High School

As discussed in greater depth in the History portion of this review, Alabama’s high school social studies sequence includes one year of modern world history in ninth grade and two years of U.S. History in tenth and eleventh grades, a combination that should leave students unusually well prepared for the required one-semester course on U.S. government in twelfth grade. Furthermore, that government course is well conceived and shows a conscious setting of priorities. The origins of the American system of government and the structure of federalism are revisited (though content standard 4 incorrectly states that the federal government has a constitutional duty to admit new states, while omitting its duty to ensure their republican form of government). There is a mature examination of the legislative, executive, and judicial branches, as well as an introduction to issues of domestic and foreign significance where a responsible citizen could make a difference. Finally, a section on contemporary politics effectively captures the realities of modern governance, with admirably specific units on suffrage, campaign finance, reapportionment, redistricting, interest groups, media, messaging, and the role of parties (content standards 7–10).

Here, as in earlier grades, special praise should also be given to the selection of illustrative judicial cases from the history of Alabama.

Skills and Dispositions

Although the skills that are most essential to citizenship—critical thinking, problem analysis, and advocacy—are not a

major theme of Alabama’s social studies standards, they are certainly present. The introductory sections make clear that students should understand the interrelationships among ideas and events in many fields, as well as between theory and practice. The reading and writing standards at the end of the document require the evaluation of information sources and understanding of how they might be manipulated. Finally, the problem analyses in seventh grade and in the elective course on contemporary world issues require that all of these skills be applied.

Yet what truly stands out is the civics standards’ commitment to a life of responsible citizenship. This commitment is evident in the General Introduction, the Position Statement on Service Learning, the attention to virtue in early grades, the delineation of significant political issues in sixth grade, the challenge to manage one’s own affairs and identify ways the United States can be improved in seventh grade, the identification of world problems in ninth grade, and the rights and responsibilities of citizens specified in twelfth grade. In addition, Alabama has standards for a high school elective course on “Contemporary World Issues and Civic Engagement,” focused on current events, that seems designed to capture the imagination and train the mind.

Clarity and Organization: 3/3

Alabama’s civics standards are, almost without exception, clearly written and presented and thus likely to be understood by teachers, students, and parents (as well as other audiences). The progression of material is good, though occasionally there is a sense that different people developed the standards for different age levels. For example, James Madison is mentioned in second grade but not in higher grades, while Machiavelli only shows up in seventh grade. (In contrast, the English Bill of Rights and Jean-Jacques Rousseau are arguably overexposed in seventh, ninth, tenth, and twelfth grades.)

Occasionally, the standards are general when greater specificity would be welcome. For example, the standards for fifth and tenth grades call for a description of the “principles” or “ideas” of the Declaration of Independence, but do not elaborate (e.g., by explicitly listing items such

as popular sovereignty, natural rights, the equality of all persons, the trusteeship of government, the delegate theory of representation, and the right of revolution). Similarly, the Fourteenth Amendment is mentioned in fifth and tenth grades, and *Brown v. Board of Education* appears in eleventh grade, yet the standards never mention the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment, which was the basis for *Brown* and many other changes in Alabama life that the standards do address.

Strengths & Weaknesses of the Alabama Civics Standards

Strengths

1. Rigorous civics content effectively complements an unusually strong U.S. History sequence.
2. There is a manifest commitment to educating responsible and respectful citizens.
3. Examples from Alabama history are well chosen.
4. There is a commendable focus on how politics is actually practiced.
5. The elective course on current events has considerable potential as a way of helping students understand where and how they can have an impact.

Weaknesses

1. There is no reference to the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment.
2. The standards for seventh grade civics cover too much ground for one semester.

U.S. History: A-

In Brief

Alabama's U.S. History standards provide a rigorous and thorough overview of American history across all grade levels (K–12). Skills essential to the analysis of historical content are also well developed, and presentation is unusually clear and user-friendly.

Content and Rigor: 6/7

K–8

Historical content for Kindergarten through third grade is typical for the age range, focusing on understandings that are fundamental to living and working together in a family, community, state, and nation. In addition to introducing students to customs, celebrations, and famous individuals, one also finds major historical events and symbols related to the principles and values of American democracy, such as the flag, the national anthem, and the Statue of Liberty, as well as prehistoric and historic Native American cultures.

Fourth grade focuses on Alabama history and is the first grade in which historical events are presented in chronological order. Commendably, the standards for fourth grade include an unusually detailed account of state history for this grade level, which includes the acquisition of tribal lands in Alabama by the United States, the Trail of Tears, the state's role during the Civil War, and Jim Crow laws—difficult topics that are sure to leave a lasting impression on students.

Fifth and sixth grades provide the first in-depth study of American history, with fifth grade covering everything from pre-Columbian civilizations to industrialization through 1877 and sixth grade continuing on to the present. The outline for fifth grade touches on prehistoric migrations, Native American cultures, European exploration, and early settlements with impressive specificity (though oddly, it includes “Jewish merchants” in a list of groups and individuals involved with Westward Expansion in content standard 13). Similarly, the outline for sixth grade does a mostly comprehensive and cohesive job of identifying essential content for the study of U.S. History.

However, there is a somewhat ambiguous reference to “states’ rights” in the fifth grade standard on the causes of the Civil War, which should either be removed or more clearly subordinated to “the issue of slavery” to avoid misinterpretation (5.11). And the decision to lump together the many changes that have occurred in the seven decades of U.S. History “since World War II” is unfortunate (content standard 9).

As noted in the Civics review, seventh grade focuses on civics and economics. However, it also draws useful connections to historical events and the emergence of political systems in the United States. For example, it discusses migration and settlement patterns along with the development of societies, including the role played by Westward Expansion.

High School

Unlike most states, Alabama devotes two full years to its high school U.S. History sequence, thus providing teachers with more time and opportunities to address topics that

Strengths & Weaknesses of the Alabama U.S. History Standards

Strengths

1. Alabama offers two full courses in U.S. History, the first spread across two years of elementary school and the second across two years of high school.
2. Both the elementary course and the high school course are impressively rigorous and detailed.
3. Analytical skill sets are clearly presented and highly relevant to the study and practice of history.
4. The U.S. History standards document is admirably clear, well organized, and user-friendly.

Weaknesses

1. Coverage of the post-1970 era is rushed.

might otherwise be overlooked or covered superficially. In general, the high school standards do an excellent job of building on prior knowledge and broadening and deepening historical skills and understandings, and thanks to the 2013 updates, the current version includes some previously neglected topics, such as Jacksonian democracy and the roles of the Grangers and Populists. Still, there are a few oversights. For example, there is no mention of pre-Columbian civilizations in high school. The eleventh grade standards appear to overlook the “Indian Wars” of the mid-to-late nineteenth century and the concurrent process of urbanization. And the final section, which starts with the Nixon administration and concludes with the election of Barack Obama as president, feels rushed and incomplete.

Skills Development

U.S. History–related “process skills,” borrowed from The QualityCore® ACT Course Standards, are outlined in Appendix B of the standards document and referenced in brackets that follow the standards for tenth and eleventh grades. These process skills include analyzing the importance of context and point of view in historical interpretation, constructing historical arguments, and debating various interpretations of the same historical event.

At the middle and high school levels, reading and writing standards “for literacy in history/social studies” are added, which address skills such as distinguishing between fact and opinion and analyzing primary and secondary sources. Like the process skills, these literacy skill sets are impressively detailed and sophisticated, demanding significant analytical and presentation skills.

Clarity and Organization: 3/3

Alabama’s U.S. History standards are commendably clear and straightforward. The introduction is well written and helpful, as are the overviews for each of the five grade bands. The table of contents makes individual grades and courses readily findable, and the content for each grade/course is clearly laid out. Finally, the level of detail and sophistication increases appropriately as students progress from elementary to high school, providing teachers and students with clear guidance as to what is expected at each successive level.

Recommendations

Civics

1. **Reduce or reallocate the civics material to be learned in seventh grade** and concentrate on Locke, Montesquieu, and Madison as sources of American constitutional thinking.
2. **Highlight the Equal Protection Clause** as the constitutional lever behind the Civil Rights Movement.
3. **Consider adding the expectation that students learn to think critically about their own opinions** (e.g., by using their understanding of confirmation bias to critique their understanding of the facts).

U.S. History

1. **Bolster the content for the post-1970 period.**
2. **Improve the generally strong high school standards by addressing a few specific oversights.**

Both

1. **Preserve the considerable merits of the current standards in any future revisions.**

Documents Reviewed

- “2010 Alabama Course of Study: Social Studies,” 2013, <https://www.alsde.edu/sec/sct/COS/2010%20Alabama%20Social%20Studies%20Course%20of%20Study.pdf>

Civics and U.S. History

Alaska

A	Exemplary	10
	Standards worthy of implementation	9
B	Good	8
	Targeted revisions recommended	7
C	Mediocre	6
	Significant revisions strongly recommended	5
D	Inadequate	4
F	Complete revision recommended before implementation	3
		2
		0-1

Civics: F

Content & Rigor: 2/7

Clarity & Organization: 0/3

Total Score: 2/10

U.S. History: F

Content & Rigor: 0/7

Clarity & Organization: 0/3

Total Score: 0/10

Overview

Alaska's current civics and U.S. History standards are inadequate, with no specific roadmap for civics and no standards whatsoever for U.S. History. A complete revision is recommended.

Description of the Standards

Alaska's content and performance standards include content standards, cultural standards, and performance standards/grade-level expectations. Government and Citizenship and History are among the eight subjects for which there are content standards, each of which is subdivided into lettered substandards (which are themselves associated with lists of corollary expectations). The cultural standards for Alaska's students focus on the state's indigenous population and include some native history. Finally, the performance standards/grade-level expectations seem to be reserved for future social studies standards and expectations but are currently limited to Alaskan history. This is divided into five chronological eras, each with four themes and associated content items that are rated according to depth of knowledge or cognitive demand. However, there are no grade-level standards for civics or U.S. History.

Civics: F

Content and Rigor: 2/7

Alaska’s content standards for Government and Citizenship are divided into eight areas: government principles, U.S. government, Alaska government, international relations, citizenship, economic policy, and economic choice.

The substandard on government principles indicates that students should understand “the necessity and purpose of government”; concepts such as sovereignty, authority, power, liberty, and property; and how “societies have governed themselves over time and in different places.” However, no other instructions are given for what persons or events to study or when, in the course of twelve years of school, to study them.

The substandard on U.S. government is similarly nebulous. Graduating students are expected to understand many worthwhile things, including the “ideals of this nation as expressed in the Declaration of Independence, the United States Constitution, and the Bill of Rights”; the American “heritage” of republican government, free enterprise, patriotism, and freedom of religion; strong family units; how power is shared in American federalism (although the standard doesn’t use the word “federalism”); the importance of individuals, interest groups, the media, and political parties in setting public policy; and the role of dissent and the rule of law. Yet there’s no reference to thinkers such as Locke, Montesquieu, or Madison; to concepts such as checks and balances or judicial review; or to moments in American history such as the Civil War, the Great Depression, or Rosa Parks’ bus ride when American values and institutions were tested. Nor is any direction given as to when or how these topics should be covered.

In comparison, the substandards on the government and economy of Alaska are strong. Notably, these include features that make Alaska distinctive, including the presence and political and economic structure of native communities, the dominant role of the federal government, the interplay between the Alaska Constitution and the Alaska Statehood Act, the significance of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, and the role of natural resources in native culture and

economy of the state including the Alaska Permanent Fund. What the standards lack is direction for when and where this content might be taught—or the other content outlined in Government and Citizenship.

Skills and Dispositions

A diligent reader can find the civics skills Alaska wants for its students: the ability to assess the relevancy and accuracy of data; to organize information to make decisions and communicate effectively; to compare costs and benefits before making decisions; and to understand how economic interest can influence public and private decisions. These are worthy skills, but their impact suffers from being scattered in the text.

Similarly, the civic dispositions that Alaska seeks to cultivate are abundant. These include a willingness to accept responsibility for protecting and enhancing Alaska’s quality of life, engage in community service, participate in discussions on public issues, and get involved in political causes. However, like civic skills, these dispositions are scattered throughout the text.

Strengths & Weaknesses of the Alaska Civics Standards

Strengths

1. The standards contain an eloquent description of the dispositions of a citizen.

Weaknesses

1. There is little to no explanation of the content required to achieve the standards.
2. The content standards are not tied to any specific grade level or band.
3. The general lack of clarity and organization renders the standards nearly unusable.

Clarity and Organization: 0/3

Although the social studies standards are easy enough to read, their organization is poor and many of the titles are misleading. The “content standards” have little content. The “grade-level expectations” have no grade-level expectations. No attempt has been made to harmonize the wording or explain the relationship between content standards, cultural standards, and performance standards. They are simply documents kept in the same folder.

U.S. History: F

In Brief

Alaska does not even attempt to provide standards for U.S. History, though there is a cursory outline of Alaska history.¹

Content and Rigor: 0/7

The Lower Forty-Eight states sometimes seems to forget that Alaska exists—and judging from its social studies standards, the state seems determined to return the favor. Alaska does not have U.S. History standards (or, for that matter, World History standards). The history strand in the content standards section is purely abstract, discussing concepts of past and present, change over time, interpretation of evidence, and research skills. Students are to “understand historical themes through factual knowledge of time, places, ideas, institutions, cultures, people, and events,” but no specific factual knowledge is outlined or even mentioned—nor do the standards say nothing about specific grade bands, much less individual grades. Sequence is nonexistent.

The only history content of any kind appears in the performance standards for Alaska history. This section does mention some specifics but only for the state of Alaska—and even this consists of a general summary of target knowledge that students are expected to acquire before graduating from high school, rather than a grade-level sequence. Though five chronological sections provide some historical structure, the actual content items are broad invocations of general

concepts organized under four thematic headings (People, Places, Environment; Consumption, Production, Distribution; Individual, Citizenship, Governance, Power; and Continuity and Change).

Unhelpfully, the history section begins with the observation that the Native American presence in Alaska dates to “time immemorial,” though the “suggested topics” for most eras point to a handful of events and themes. Content items across the five time periods ask students to look at concepts such as population movement, patterns of growth, and unnamed “significant individuals or groups.” A few scattered specifics appear as optional examples under the content items.

Even as an outline of Alaska history, the performance standards are barely adequate.

Skills Development

The otherwise content-free content standards do address skills to some extent. One section asks students to understand concepts of chronology, multiple historical perspectives, and that interpretations change with new evidence. Another discusses research skills, asking students to use technological resources to retrieve data, use primary documents, and apply critical thinking skills. These injunctions are not detailed and are of limited use when the standards fail entirely to specify any actual historical sequence or content to which such skills could be applied.

Strengths & Weaknesses of the Alaska U.S. History Standards

Strengths

1. History-related analytical and research skills are broadly addressed.

Weaknesses

1. Save for a thinly detailed section on Alaska history, U.S. History is not included in the standards.

Clarity and Organization: 0/3

As described under Civics, the Alaska social studies standards are strangely organized and entirely lacking in scope or sequence. As there is no U.S. History coverage, scope and sequence for the subject area are by definition nonexistent. Only Alaska history receives any coverage at all, with minimal detail and no grade-level sequence.

Recommendations

Civics

1. Specify what every student in Alaska should know about their national and state governments.

U.S. History

1. Include U.S. History in the social studies standards.

Both

1. Lay out expectations for specific grade levels.
2. Provide much more substantive content.

Documents Reviewed

- “Content and Performance Standards for Alaska Students” [Government and Citizenship; History], 2016, <https://education.alaska.gov/akstandards/standards/ContentStandards.pdf>

ENDNOTES

1. https://acpe.alaska.gov/Portals/3/OTHER/Misc/HS_Grad_Requirements_2019.pdf

Civics and U.S. History

Arizona

A	Exemplary	10
	Standards worthy of implementation	9
B	Good	8
	Targeted revisions recommended	7
C	Mediocre	6
	Significant revisions strongly recommended	5
D F	Inadequate	4
	Complete revision recommended before implementation	3
		2
		0-1

Civics: C-

Content & Rigor: 4/7

Clarity & Organization: 1/3

Total Score: 5/10

U.S. History: D+

Content & Rigor: 3/7

Clarity & Organization: 1/3

Total Score: 4/10

Overview

Arizona's K-12 civics standards are mediocre, and its U.S. History standards are inadequate. Cryptic presentation, a reluctance to specify essential content, and a skills-based approach leave districts and teachers with little practical guidance. On the civics side, significant revisions are strongly recommended, and for U.S. History a complete revision is recommended.

Description of the Standards

Arizona has separate social studies standards for each grade through grade 8 and a single set of standards for high school. Standards are divided into five "disciplines"—skills and processes, civics, economics, geography, and history—that are subdivided into recurring "anchor standards." Each K-8 grade begins with a "storyline and content focus" summarizing the coverage goals. However, starting in third grade, the standards make clear that local school districts have the final word on what is taught (though the state does specify the number of instructional minutes that should be devoted to social studies). The high school standards consist of "course considerations" for each discipline, from which districts select when creating courses. Nevertheless, it's expected that students will be "taught all twenty-one anchor standards and the standards that fall under them" prior to graduation, and students are also to take one semester of Civics/Government and one year of U.S./Arizona History.

Civics: C-

In Brief

Arizona’s civics standards competently reference a great deal of essential content in an incredibly cryptic manner, and the elementary standards are somewhat unrealistic.

Content and Rigor: 4/7

K-8

The civics content in grades K-2 focuses on conventional themes, including national symbols and holidays, the reasons for rules, and the importance of voting, volunteering, and working together to solve problems.

In third grade, which focuses on Arizona, students are expected to learn about the origins, structure, and functions of the Arizona Constitution, the three branches of state and national government (and the “major responsibilities” of each branch), the basic services provided by state and local governments, how those services are paid for, how state and local officials are chosen, how people can participate in their government, the twenty-two Indian Nations in Arizona and tribal government, the concepts of individual rights and common good, and other substantive issues including but not limited to segregation, internment, and women’s rights. Compared to prior grades, this is quite a jump. And the presentation, though straightforward, is cryptic and thus leaves districts and teachers with a great deal of work (for example, there is no explanation of the “origins” or “structure” of tribal governments, which isn’t the sort of thing that gets covered in most elementary teaching programs).

In a similar vein, fourth grade uses the history of the Americas until 1763 to introduce important questions of liberty, justice, equality, and representation. Yet again, the wording is cryptic. For example, according to the standards,

Key concepts include but are not limited to governmental structures, views on property ownership and land use, representative assemblies, town meetings,

colonial legislatures, and royal governments throughout the Americas in the time period being studied (4.C1.1).

Like the wording of the third-grade standards, the wording of this standard suggests a reasonably clear grasp of the subject material. Still, an awful lot of ground is being covered in a single sentence, and many of the most important questions go unanswered: Which governmental structures are we talking about? Whose views on property ownership? Which colonial legislatures? And why?

Matters come to a head in fifth grade, which addresses the history of the United States from 1763 to the 1900s but suggests also including “Ancient Greece and Rome, Enlightenment thinkers like John Locke, British documents like the Magna Carta, colonial governments, the Articles of Confederation, and the compromises and ratification debates of the Constitutional Convention,” not to mention the Preamble to the Constitution, the seven articles, the Bill of Rights and “all subsequent amendments,” Hamilton and Jefferson, Lincoln and Calhoun, the Civil War and Reconstruction, political parties, and civil disobedience. That menu seems overloaded—if all the topics on it are to be taken seriously. Yet the grade 5 standards also suggest the study of the “landmark Supreme Court cases” and “current issues regarding federalism and rights.”

Compared to the civics standards for grades 3-5, the civics standards for sixth and seventh grade, which deal with “Global Studies” in the Eastern and Western hemispheres, respectively, are broad, brief, and relatively contentless (e.g., “Compare historical and contemporary means of changing societies to promote the common good”). This is unfortunate, as these grades (seventh grade in particular) seem like the obvious place to introduce students to forms of government, ideally through examples such as Athenian democracy and the Roman Republic.

Fortunately, the light of citizenship comes on in eighth grade, which focuses on “Citizenship and Civic Engagement in Today’s Society.” As the title suggests, the civics standards for this grade are more extensive, present oriented, and outwardly focused, opening with a list of current issues including immigration, “human rights and genocide,” and “environmental issues.”

There is much to praise about the direction the standards seem to point when it comes to civic engagement. For example, students are expected to “identify, research, analyze, discuss, and defend a position on a national, state, or local public policy issue including an action plan to address or inform others about the issue” (8.C4.4), as well as “engage in projects to help or inform others such as community service and service-learning projects” (8.C1.4). Yet the content standards for the grade 8 course are uneven. For example, a standard on the impact of political and civic institutions provides the following clarification:

Key concepts include but are not limited to political party platforms, structure of parties on a national, state, and local level including precincts, primary and general elections, presidential nominating system including conventions, congressional elections including congressional districts, gerrymandering, and census, electoral college including how electors are chosen in Arizona, types of interest groups, and role of the media (8.C3.1).

There is a lot of meat on that bone. But the presentation, which seems to give equal billing to “precincts” and “interest groups,” leaves something to be desired. Meanwhile, only a few lines previously, students are expected to “explain specific roles, rights and responsibilities of people in a society” (8.C2.2). Perhaps that standard should be deleted and the longer standard should be divided into more manageable servings.

High School

The high school civics content consists of a list of twelve “course considerations” and twenty-one standards. As in prior grades, the degree of detail varies widely and mysteriously for the course considerations. For example, “civil liberties and civil rights,” has no explanation whatsoever—no concepts, clauses, history, current events, or even a case such as *Miranda v. Arizona* (1966). Yet the next topic, “American political culture, values, and principles that are basic to American constitutional democracy and the republic,” lists “individual rights, popular sovereignty, common good, patriotism, rule of law, freedom of conscience and expression, privacy, civil society, justice,

representative government, checks and balances, freedom of religion, civilian control of the military, and equality” by way of explanation. On the plus side, that list covers most of what is typically considered “civics.” But as in previous grades, the organization and presentation leave something to be desired. Similarly, the usefulness and appeal of the standards vary depending on the details provided. For example, one standard suggests that students “compare the rights guaranteed in Arizona Constitution to those in the United States Constitution” (HS.C2.5), which sounds like an interesting discussion starter. Yet another standard (HS.C3.4) suggests that students “analyze the impact of constitutions, laws, treaties, charters, and agreements on the maintenance of international order,” which sounds considerably less stimulating or useful.

Strengths & Weaknesses of the Arizona Civics Standards

Strengths

1. Overall, the standards provide sensible and substantive (if somewhat general) content guidance.
2. The standards express a commitment to active citizenship.
3. The use of perspectives as a learning tool holds promise for students’ engagement in civic dialogue.

Weaknesses

1. The cryptic wording of the standards provides educators with little guidance.
2. The fifth-grade standards don’t provide much sense of priority.
3. The high school standards give short shrift to topics such as due process, equal protection, and comparative politics.

In general, the Arizona standards document is too cryptic, but the problem is most noticeable in high school, where one expects to find references to specific Supreme Court cases and pieces of legislation. For example, the topic of comparative government is addressed in the course considerations with a reference to “constitutional vs. nonconstitutional systems” and the words “comparative governments,” and another bullet devotes a total of ten words to the subject of foreign policy. Inexplicably, there is not any mention of equal protection or federalism at the high school level, nor is there any mention of due process anywhere in the document.

Finally, there is little on Arizona’s unique issues, such as its international border, water rights, and tribal government (cases such as *Arizona v. United States* (2012), *Arizona v. Colorado* (1963), and *McClanahan v. Arizona State Tax Comm’n* (1973) and *Kerr-McGee v. Navajo Tribe* (1985) could get the ball rolling here), nor do the standards give much sense that nonindigenous Arizonans live on only 18 percent of the territory and of the fiscal and land management issues this raises.

Ultimately, the high school civics expectations are less rigorous and detailed than the expectations for other grade levels.

Skills and Dispositions

The development of critical thinking skills can be traced through all grades under “Disciplinary Skills and Processes.” The four anchor standards (time, perspective, evidence, and causation) are a useful framework, and at times they work brilliantly. For example, the fifth-grade “perspective” skill asks students to see events through eyes of loyalists and patriots, federalists and anti-federalists, Hamilton and Jefferson, abolitionists and slave owners, Lincoln and Calhoun, labor and business, nativists and immigrants, and American Indians and settlers. More examples such as these in other grades, and for other anchor standards, would make the critical thinking standards come alive.

The disposition to engage, solve problems, and serve the community is an express goal of the Arizona civics standards, and the Grand Canyon State’s grade 8 civics standards are clearly directed to this end. The high school standards

are more nuanced, expecting students to understand the causes of local, regional, and global problems; recognize the challenges and opportunities that face those trying to address them; and assess the options for action. However, by looking far, the standards may miss what is near. Although Arizona’s tribes are appropriately mentioned in the standards for grades 1, 3, 4, and 5, when the time comes for citizenship – in 8th grade and high school – actions by, with, and for Arizona’s Native American communities are barely mentioned.

Clarity and Organization: 1/3

At times, the efficiency with which the Arizona standards address the most important civics content is refreshing. Yet ultimately, the cryptic nature of the standards is a barrier to understanding. In addition to imposing practical limits on the amount of detail that can feasibly be included, the reliance on dense lists, both in the “course descriptions” and in the “key concepts” associated with some standards, means that major and minor points are often given equal billing in a way that cannot be helpful to educators who are looking for guidance. And of course, there is also a risk that important topics will be overlooked if they are buried in lengthy laundry lists.

In general, tracking the core civics content across grade levels is harder than it should be. For example, in Kindergarten and grade 1, most of that content is under “history.” In grade 4, it is split between civics and history. In grade 5, it is split between the beginning summary, disciplinary skills, and civics. In grade 8, it is split between the summary and civics. Finally, high school civics content can also be found in the course considerations, the civics standards, and the course considerations for U.S. History and World History.

U.S. History: D+

In Brief

Arizona provides only limited specifics in a seriously flawed sequence, and the hands-off, themes-over-content approach suggests that students across the state will not receive any consistent grounding in essential U.S. History content.

Content and Rigor: 3/7

K-8

Grades K-2 focus on children's connection to their communities and world. The history strand—organized under the fixed set of thematic anchor standards—mentions Arizona's Indian Nations and conventionally invokes American symbols and holidays. Grade 3 focuses on "Arizona Studies" and hints at a historical focus with the words "prehistoric to present-day Arizona." However, while the history strand mentions diverse inhabitants, unspecified explorers, and unnamed influential individuals, it offers no hint of historical outline or chronology.

Grades 4 and 5 are meant to offer a partial U.S. History survey: from precontact to 1763 in grade 4 and "American Revolution to Industrialism (1763 to 1900s)" in grade 5. However, in keeping with its stated aim of leaving specific course building to local authorities, Arizona provides extremely slim content guidance.

The grade 4 introduction delineates some basic aims for the course, mentioning Native American cultures and Colonial history in broad strokes (e.g., "Regional settlement patterns, significant developments, and life in the Southern, Middle, and New England colonies"). Among the actual standards, historical references are scattered across the various themes and strands, including disciplinary skills (slavery and various Colonial lifeways), civics (representative assemblies and religious freedom), and economics (the triangular trade). The history strand mentions the various European empires in the Americas, early Native American civilizations, and a rather random assortment of specific points, including the rise of constitutional government, the fusion of African traditions with new influences in forming African American society,

religious tensions in the New England colonies, and religious objections to slavery—but, again, nothing that could be called an orderly outline.

In a similar vein, the grade 5 introduction mentions some key events between the American Revolution and industrialization, including some sophisticated points such as the influence of state constitutions on the U.S. Constitution. But the handful of thematic bullet points do no real justice to the era and provide no useful outline for teachers. And again, the scattering of content across strands and thematic anchor standards results in a confusing distribution of concepts that needlessly boggles chronology. "Disciplinary skills" names pairs of historical opponents such as Jefferson and Hamilton, federalists and anti-federalists, abolitionists and slaveowners, and the odd combination of Lincoln and Calhoun (Calhoun was dead when Lincoln became prominent), along with general references to immigration, Manifest Destiny, segregation, and other decontextualized concepts. Civics mentions Locke and Magna Carta, and economics touches on Revolutionary-era smuggling, secession, unregulated industry, and other isolated fragments. Yet the history strand itself is very brief and purely general, mentioning conflicts, social movements, diverse groups, and so on, with no specific examples.

After two years of world history, grade 8 focuses on "Citizenship and Civic Engagement in Today's Society." Notably, grade 7 mentions the world wars, Cold War, Korea, and Vietnam in the global context, and the introduction to grade 8 mentions "civil rights movements throughout American history," along with a few other U.S. historical references. Yet the standards themselves are general, and U.S. History isn't the focus of the course. For example, one eighth-grade history standard asks students to "investigate how conflict can be both unifying and divisive both domestically and internationally" (8.H.2.2).

High School

The actual high school standards (which are still organized under the same five strands) are meant to be applied to each of the four courses and thus offer little specific guidance on any individual course. The civics strand mentions historical documents, legislation, court cases, and so on without any examples and invokes broad principles of American Constitutionalism. The history strand is purely thematic/

conceptual, listing aspects of societal development, diversity, conflict, institutions, and so forth.

The closest thing to content guidance for high school U.S. History is the half-page of “Course Considerations for High School United States/Arizona History.” The course—to the extent that it’s defined—is required to cover the time period from the Revolution to the present (local authorities are free to broaden the scope, but there is no requirement to revisit the pre-Revolutionary era, which is required only in grade 4). Seven bullet points offer a basic checklist of required content and point to number of important issues, including the antebellum reform movements, industrialization, immigration, expansion of slavery, and Jim Crow, in roughly chronological order. Yet merely noting that a course should address the “causes, course, and impact of the Civil War” and “the role of government, impact of the depression on diverse groups of Americans, The New Deal, and the cause and course of World War II” does not constitute an outline. Thus, the state largely abdicates its role in ensuring that its students will complete high school with common exposure to essential U.S. History content.

Strengths & Weaknesses of the Arizona U.S. History Standards

Strengths

1. The standards’ thematic approach does allow for a reasonably strong focus on history-related analytical and research skills.

Weaknesses

1. Content guidance is extremely thin.
2. The U.S. History sequence is flawed, relegating the Colonial period to grade 4.
3. The rigidly thematic arrangement of the content standards is a barrier to chronological reasoning.

Skills Development

Consistent with its goal of laying out broad educational objectives rather than course specifics, Arizona pays more attention to skills than historical substance. An “inquiry arc” defined in the front matter asks students to develop questions, gather and evaluate sources, and develop and communicate conclusions. The disciplinary skills and processes strand is well developed, introducing the concept of primary sources in Kindergarten, emphasizing varying historical perspectives and assessment of sources during the later elementary grades, and pointing to more specific research skills in primary and secondary sources in high school. Other strands ask students to, among other things, develop chronological reasoning, explain differences in perspective across historical periods, and evaluate claims, although the historical content that they are expected to exercise these skills upon is, as noted, unspecified.

Clarity and Organization: 1/3

As noted under civics, Arizona’s social studies standards are undermined by their organizationally rigid repetition of fixed, thematic anchor standards. Furthermore, although the front matter and introductions specify what’s meant to be covered in each year, the U.S. History sequence is murky and flawed. The subject receives two years in primary school, a passing mention in the middle school citizenship course, and one year in high school. However, although grade 4 is clearly defined, running from precontact civilizations to 1763, grade 5 runs vaguely from 1763 to “Industrialism (1900s)” (and the thinly detailed content outline doesn’t provide any clarity). Consequently, there is no real coverage of twentieth- or twenty-first-century U.S. History until high school, which covers the period from the Revolution to the present (thus relegating the Colonial era to grade 4). Finally, scope is inadequate at all levels, with no specific historical content beyond a cursory checklist and randomly specific snippets.

Recommendations

Civics

- 1. Wherever possible, add specific examples to clarify the intent and scope of the standards** (e.g., by citing specific Supreme Court cases and pieces of legislation in high school).
- 2. Reduce the volume of material to be covered in fifth grade** (e.g., by moving classical Greece and Rome to seventh grade, prioritizing the most important Constitutional amendments, and leaving “landmark Supreme Court cases” for higher grades).
- 3. Bolster the high school course** (e.g., by adding discrete and nuanced standards on topics such as due process, equal protection, and comparative politics).

U.S. History

- 1. Improve the U.S. History sequence, ideally by offering a full introductory course in early grades** (e.g., fourth and fifth grade) and another, more advanced course in high school.
- 2. Within grade levels, ensure that essential historical content is specified in chronological order.**

Both subjects

- 1. Provide more detailed guidance at all levels.**

Documents Reviewed

- “Arizona History and Social Science Standards,” 2018, <https://cms.azed.gov/home/GetDocumentFile?id=5bd773421dcb250b94e9170a>

Arkansas

A	Exemplary	10
	Standards worthy of implementation	9
B	Good	8
	Targeted revisions recommended	7
C	Mediocre	6
	Significant revisions strongly recommended	5
D	Inadequate	4
	Complete revision recommended before implementation	3
F		2
		0-1

Civics: C

Content & Rigor: 4/7

Clarity & Organization: 1/3

Total Score: 5/10

U.S. History: C

Content & Rigor: 4/7

Clarity & Organization: 1/3

Total Score: 5/10

Overview

Arkansas's civics and U.S. History standards are mediocre. Although they touch on most of the typical topics in both subjects, the standards are worded so broadly that they lack any sense of depth or priority. Significant revisions are strongly recommended.

Description of the Standards

Arkansas's Standards for Social Studies are organized into grades K-4, grades 5-6, grade 7, grade 8, and grades 9-12. What are typically referred to as standards documents are called "Social Studies Curriculum Frameworks," which are divided into four strands: civics/government, economics, geography, and history. Each of these is subdivided into three or four overarching "content standards," which are broken into more specific student learning expectations (SLEs) that become more sophisticated as the grade level increases and are intended to align with key dimensions of the C3 Framework (such as developing and answering questions, understanding concepts, gathering and evaluating evidence, and communicating and evaluating arguments).¹

Civics: C

In Brief

Arkansas’s civics standards touch on most of the subjects that should be covered in a K–12 civics curriculum, but that coverage is so broad that it provides only basic direction to teachers. In general, the standards are well organized and presented, but the learning expectations in the early grades aren’t rigorous enough, and some essential content is omitted from the required high school course in Civics.

Content and Rigor: 4/7

K–8

The civics/government strand for grades K–4 and 5–6 is divided into three “content standards” or broad areas of focus. The first deals with the origin, structure, and function of civic/political institutions. The second focuses on civil rights, roles, and responsibilities. The third covers the sources and functions of laws, as well as the processes for making and amending them.

Kindergarten and grade 1 introduce students to the school community and other authority figures they know (for instance, “Describe the role of a school and its leaders,” C.1.K.2.). Grades 2, 3, and 4 formalize the analysis of authority by studying, successively, local, state, and national governments, while also introducing students to the Constitution and the Bill of Rights.

Aside from introducing governments, the K–4 civics curriculum is thin, and the wording of several standards exhibits little change across the individual grade levels. For example, grade K students are to “recognize” state and national symbols and patriotic songs, while grade 1 students are to “describe” them, grade 2 students are to “explain their significance,” grade 3 students are to “investigate their origins,” and grade 4 students are to “analyze the role” they play in fostering citizenship. Similarly, students spend three years (grades 2–5) identifying and explaining the origin and purpose of the Constitution and Bill of Rights and seven years (grades K–6) learning proper procedures for recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance and flag etiquette.

In fifth grade, students “examine” six foundational documents: the Magna Carta, English Bill of Rights, Mayflower Compact, Declaration of Independence, Articles of Confederation, and U.S. Constitution. These are excellent choices, but aside from references to the separation of powers and checks and balances, no guidance is given on what the documents should be examined for. Magna Carta, for example, lays the foundation for modern ideas of consent, limited government, checks on the executive branch, property rights, and criminal procedures, but it is medieval when it comes to addressing religion, speech, and class. Similarly, the Declaration of Independence contains powerful ideas of popular sovereignty, natural rights, equality, representation, the trusteeship of government, and the right of revolution. Not every teacher will know these elements, so it would be helpful to list them.

The learning expectations for civics/government in grades K–6 are consistently expressed in terms so broad as to be nebulous. In fact, the glossaries for K–4 and 5–6 Social Studies contain just four terms relative to civics and government (out of a total eighty-five). As the above references to the Magna Carta and the Declaration of Independence show, the glossary should be rich with political terms.

Civics learning in grades 7–8 comes from the study of U.S. History during the nineteenth century and Arkansas history more generally. The U.S. History standards miss many opportunities to connect history to civics for the benefit of middle school students. For example, the content standard on sectionalism should mention the protection of slavery in the Constitution, the 3/5ths Clause, the power of Congress to admit new states, and the Supremacy Clause. Similarly, the content standard on secession (a topic which, strangely, is not addressed in Arkansas history) should mention arguments over the nature of the Union based on the Declaration of Independence, the Articles of Confederation, and the Constitution. Finally, the content standard on Reconstruction could address the relationship between the Emancipation Proclamation and Thirteenth Amendment, the Civil Rights Act of 1866 and Fourteenth Amendment, and the Reconstruction Act of 1867 and operation of the Electoral College in the election of 1876. Instead, it asks students to examine Reconstruction’s effects in Arkansas with references to sharecropping and segregation law.

High School

Civics learning in high school comes from a required semester-long course on Civics, a required year-long course on U.S. History since 1890, and from elective courses in U.S. Government, African American History, and Arkansas History.

Like the standards for lower grade levels, the wording of the standards for these courses is broad and nebulous. For example, the first Civics expectation suggests that students “analyze the establishment and purposes of government” (CPI.1.C.1), which could mean any number of things, from a discussion of rule of law to a close reading of Locke. Similarly, the third expectation suggests that students “analyze the rationale for the structure of the U.S. Constitution” (CPI.1.C.3).

Another expectation suggests that students “analyze the purpose, organization, authority, and function of each of the three branches of government at the federal and state levels” (CPI.1.C.4). At a minimum, this cosmic expectation should be split into three multipronged and appropriately nuanced expectations—one for each branch of government. In contrast, the expectation that students “evaluate interaction among federal, state, and local governments” (PRL.7.C.1) could safely be combined with the expectation that they “analyze cooperation and conflict between federal and state governments” (PRL.7.C.3).

Other expectations are closer to the mark. For example, a standard on the “rights of citizens” includes a commendable expectation dealing with the impact of Arkansas law on students, while another standard focuses on the interplay of primary elections, interest groups, and media in modern elections. Yet even these comparatively strong standards would benefit from more specific detail. For example, the standard on “rights” doesn’t mention a single Supreme Court case—nor does any other civics standard.

To be fair, students who successfully complete the required course in Civics have the option of taking another semester of U.S. Government, which includes multiple Supreme Court cases plus some other details and topics that aren’t included in Civics. However, although the expectations for this course are more specific than those for Civics, they are still very broad. For example, students are expected to “examine multiple points of view from a variety of Greek, Roman, and Enlightenment thinkers to discuss ways they influenced the

formation of the United States government” (PP.1.USG.1). And the expectation that students learn to evaluate “how *judicial activism* and *judicial restraint* have affected U.S. Supreme Court decisions” (IACP.7.USG.3) suggests there is a consensus about when those terms apply—when there is not.

In addition to these issues, the high school history courses could benefit from more ties to civics. For example, in discussing the Treaty of Versailles, the New Deal, the Civil Rights Movement, and the changing role of the federal government, the standards for the required U.S. History course miss an opportunity to cite the specific powers of Congress to approve treaties, regulate interstate commerce, enforce the Fourteenth Amendment, and provide for the general welfare—which would be particularly helpful,

Strengths & Weaknesses of the Arkansas Civics Standards

Strengths

1. General coverage of civics topics is good—at least, if the contents of the elective course on U.S. Government are included.
2. The high school standards clearly map to the required coursework in Civics and U.S. History (as well as the elective course in U.S. Government).

Weaknesses

1. Many SLEs are broad and nebulous.
2. The introduction to key civics concepts and facts in the early years is too slow.
3. Key linkages between history and civics are missing.
4. Little attention is paid to critical thinking or to the immediate prospect of active citizenship, especially in the high school Civics course.

given that the civics and U.S. government standards call only for a general examination of the “powers of the federal government.”

Skills and Dispositions

The introduction to the high school Civics course indicates that students should be able to “select and evaluate sources of information, draw and build upon ideas, explore issues, and analyze events from the full range of human experience to develop critical thinking skills essential for productive citizens.” These are all important expectations, but they are unfortunately nebulous as written. Critical thinking skills include distinguishing between fact and opinion, cause and correlation, intended and unintended consequences, and personal and public interest. They also require understanding the role of groupthink and confirmation bias in one’s thinking. It is doubtful that one mention of “critical thinking” is sufficient to communicate these aspects of mature thought.

In a similar vein, fifth-grade Social Studies includes a content standard that addresses the fostering of citizenship and civic duties. And one standard for the elective course on U.S. Government suggests that students “apply constitutional principles to a variety of current issues (e.g., popular sovereignty, separation of powers, checks and balances, [and] federalism” (IACP.8.USG2.). However, there is no equivalent standard for the required Civics course, where students merely “evaluate rights and responsibilities of citizens in the United States” (CPI.2.C.2). As that standard suggests, the tone throughout the standards is observational rather than participatory.

Clarity and Organization: 1/3

The relations among “curriculum framework,” “strands,” “content standards,” “student learning outcomes,” and “dimensions” are not clearly explained in the introductions to the course outlines. Although these terms may be familiar to educators in Arkansas, this vocabulary is a barrier to public understanding unless it is laid out simply.

Furthermore, Arkansas’s standards use very broad language to describe “student learning outcomes.” For example, sixth graders are expected to “explain the development of policies to address public problems in various civilizations over time,” but no policy, public problem, or civilization is referenced.

Finally, although Arkansas’s grade is based solely on the quality of the guidance provided by its standards, it’s worth noting some topics that are essential to informed citizenship (e.g., federalism and equal protection) are omitted from the required Civics course, meaning that students who don’t take the elective course on U.S. Government will never be exposed to them.

U.S. History: C

In Brief

Arkansas’s U.S. History standards often provide a basic outline of essential content. But many items are excessively broad, supporting detail is erratic, and the U.S. History sequence is flawed.

Content and Rigor: 4/7

K-8

For grades K-4, the history strand is divided into thematic content standards that focus on chronology, change over time, contextualization, perspective, historical evidence, and causation. As that list suggests, the K-4 grades mostly focus on skills and activities over substantive content: creating timelines and narratives, comparing past and present, using maps and photos, formulating questions that relate to (unnamed) historical events, describing people’s perspectives, and so on. Only occasional specifics appear as examples—a few holidays in Kindergarten, some state and national symbols, and historic places in grades 3 and 4.

Grade 5 provides the first actual U.S. History content standard and seeks to cover everything from pre-Columbian societies to the 1820s. Content items are very broad—e.g., “Evaluate short- and long-term effects of European exploration and settlement in the Americas and Arkansas from multiple perspectives (e.g., Roanoake, Jamestown, disease, conflict)” (H.12.5.4). But they do provide at least a basic checklist of many important themes, with pertinent if patchy illustrative examples. Regional differences in the colonies and the establishment of slavery are noted, but the rise of self-government is not. Some sophisticated points

are at least hinted at, such as the “weakness of the Articles of Confederation,” yet other important topics are left wholly undefined (for example, students are expected to “examine short- and long-term effects of the drafting and signing of the U.S. Constitution” [H.12.5.14]).

After two years of world history and geography coursework (in grades 6 and 7), grade 8 returns to U.S. History—the nineteenth century, in particular. Notably, the period before 1800 is covered only in grade 5 and is not revisited, which is a problem. And grade 8’s content items are, if anything, *less* specific than grade 5’s: Items for “expansion and reform” (1801–61) mention both territorial and economic expansion—together with Indian removal and several sectional clashes over slavery—but *not* the reform movements. “Disenfranchisement” appears, but not the Jacksonian expansion of universal White male suffrage. “Evaluate the historical significance of individuals, groups, and events” is uselessly vague.

A few specifics appear for the Civil War and Reconstruction, including the Reconstruction Amendments, Freedmen’s Bureau, and sharecropping—but despite highlighting clashes over slavery in the previous era, the standards list “state’s rights” first and “abolitionism” last among causes of the Civil War. In addition to downplaying the issue of slavery, this formulation also misses the primary importance of free-soil antislavery, a very different movement from “abolitionism.”

The second industrial revolution, immigration, labor movement, Indian policy, and American expansionism are touched upon in the standards for 1870–1900, but specifics remain erratic. There are examples for foreign expansion and for “social, economic, and political issues” (including Tammany Hall and Populism) but few or no examples for most topics. Notably, *Plessy v. Ferguson* and the rise of Jim Crow go unmentioned.

A separate document—Arkansas history for grades 7 and 8—touches on scattered specifics, including segregation laws (though the lack of direct references to slavery is again notable). It is unclear how this material is meant to be integrated with the World History and U.S. History courses assigned to grades 7 and 8.

High School

The high school U.S. History course covers the period from 1890 to the present. However, many content items are again too broad, such as the expectation that students “analyze the historical significance of battles, events, and people during WWI” (Era7.1.US.H.3). Others are *both* broad and heavily skills focused, such as the expectation that students “evaluate [the] credibility and limitations of primary and secondary sources representing multiple perspectives about the changing role of the United States in the world from 1890–1930” [Era7.1.US.H.6]). Specifics, offered as illustrative examples, are patchy and appear only for about half of the standards (more turn up in the more recent periods).

Many basic topics are mentioned, from U.S. expansionism and World War I, Progressivism, immigration, change during the 1920s, the Depression and its impact, World

Strengths & Weaknesses of the Arkansas U.S. History Standards

Strengths

1. The U.S. History outline points to a substantial amount of essential content.
2. History-related skills are emphasized.

Weaknesses

1. Content coverage is broad and patchy.
2. Arkansas lays out a single U.S. History sequence across grade 5, grade 8, and high school, meaning the crucial period before 1800 is only covered in grade 5.
3. Little historical content is offered in grades K–4, where children are capable of absorbing at least introductory historical overviews.

War II and its impact, the Cold War, Civil Rights and other reform efforts, post-1968 foreign policy, and a brief glance at globalization and other social/cultural/technological changes post-1968. Yet coverage remains general—often telling teachers and students to learn and understand a given issue rather than helping them do so by explaining it even with another sentence or two. Specifics that do appear are simple checklists of suggested examples, though a seemingly random few receive additional explanation in a glossary at the end of the document (Progressivism and nativism are defined, for instance, but protectionism, the gold standard, and communism are not). Finally, some handling of content seems careless: though several New Deal programs are mentioned by name, including the Tennessee Valley Authority and social security, the New Deal itself is never named.

More detail is offered in later eras. For example, the coverage of the Cold War is better than the coverage of World War II. And coverage of 1970s and 1980s foreign policy is fairly specific (though stripped of context by the failure to even mention Reagan and the New Right). Still, too many items remain overly broad, such as the expectation that students “examine continuity and change in domestic policies over multiple administrations since 1968 using a variety of primary and secondary sources” (Era10.7.US.H.1).

Two additional high school courses—Arkansas History and African American History—provide expanded U.S. History coverage for students who take them. Like the standards for the U.S. History course, the standards for these courses are broad, though the outlines do touch on a number of important points. Oddly, students are expected to “analyze migration patterns, both voluntary and involuntary, from Africa to the Americas” in the unit of African American History that deals with the “Colonial period (1619-1775),” although voluntary migration from Africa was hardly occurring during this era.

Skills Development

Arkansas puts significant emphasis on history-related skills. Each of the Arkansas social studies documents presents the same eight, generally sensible analytical skills derived from the C3 Framework, focused on developing and supporting analytical questions, gathering evidence from multiple sources, and communicating conclusions—including

assessing the credibility of evidence invoked “by self and others.” Individual content items (the SLEs) are cross-referenced to the Common Core English Language Arts (ELA) and the C3 framework.

Arkansas also offers a “Disciplinary Literacy Standards Resource for History/Social Studies,” built on the state’s ELA standards, which lay out reading and writing standards for grade bands 6–8, 9–10, and 11–12. These lengthy and high-quality guidelines delineate skills for understanding and assessing sources and arguments, including evaluating bias and avoiding plagiarism.

Clarity and Organization: 1/3

As discussed in the Civics review, Arkansas’s social studies standards documents are generally intuitive and usable. However, the introductory material for the many social studies documents leaves unclear what should be taught when. For example, is the grade 7–8 Arkansas history material meant to be integrated with the World Cultures and U.S. History courses in those grades? And how are the high school Arkansas History and African American History courses meant to relate to the high school U.S. History course? (And does the order in which students take them matter?)

Another organizational issue relates to how content is covered in the elementary and upper grades. Basic historical themes should be introduced in the elementary and middle grades and revisited in greater depth at the high school level. Yet the specified U.S. History sequence fails to accomplish that, with the period before 1800 relegated to grade 5 and not revisited at higher grade levels.

Recommendations

Civics

1. **Include more details and examples** in all student learning expectations.
2. **Highlight the links between history and civics.**
3. **Bolster the high school Civics course** (e.g., by including essential topics such as federalism and equal protection, as well as the expectation that students apply their knowledge to the analysis of current events).

U.S. History

1. **Make two full passes through U.S. History**, broadly in primary grades and then comprehensively in grade 8 and high school.
2. **Provide more consistent detail** to address the many gaps in coverage and at least basic explanations of *why* key developments are important.
3. **Address the rise of Jim Crow and other difficult topics more explicitly.**

Both subjects

1. **Increase the amount of civics and U.S. History content to be learned by fifth grade.**
2. **Expand the introductory material** in all social studies documents to clearly explain how they are to be used and sequenced, as well as how they overlap.

Documents Reviewed

- “Arkansas Social Studies Standards and Courses (Grades K–8 and high school),” 2014, <https://dese.ade.arkansas.gov/Offices/learning-services/curriculum-support/social-studies-standards-and-courses>

ENDNOTES

1. See *Purposes, Practices, and Implications of the College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards*: <https://members.socialstudies.org/Scripts/4Disapi.dll/store/social-studies-for-the-next-generation-purposes-practices-and-implications-of-the-college-career-and-civic-life-c3-framework-for-socialstudies-state-standards-national-council-for-the-social-studies/1139/>

California

A	Exemplary	10
	Standards worthy of implementation	9
B	Good	8
	Targeted revisions recommended	7
C	Mediocre	6
	Significant revisions strongly recommended	5
D	Inadequate	4
	Complete revision recommended before implementation	3
2		
0-1		
F		

Civics: A-

Content & Rigor: 6/7

Clarity & Organization: 3/3

Total Score: 9/10

U.S. History: A-

Content & Rigor: 6/7

Clarity & Organization: 3/3

Total Score: 9/10

Overview

California’s civics and U.S. History standards are exemplary. Clear prose, rigorous content, and explanatory depth are the norm, although the decision to provide only one pass through U.S. History is unfortunate. Despite that decision and a few other oversights, we recommend the continued implementation of these standards.

Description of the Standards

Although California’s 1998 social studies standards remain in effect, the focus of this review is the more recent, more extensive, and officially adopted “History-Social Science Framework.”¹ After extensive introductory material, the framework offers chapters describing goals for each grade K–12, including for required high school courses in U.S. History and “Principles of American Democracy.” Interspersed among these are chapters covering “Instructional Practice” for the K–5, 6–8, and 9–12 grade bands, which summarize skill targets for civics and government, economics, geography, and history, plus more general literacy and research skills. The last five chapters deal with assessment, access and equity, instructional strategies, professional learning, and the choice of instructional materials. Finally, a series of appendices deal with “educating for democracy” (Appendix E) and service learning (Appendix H), among other topics.

Rather than employing a conventional outline approach, California’s framework provides an expository text for each grade/course, explaining how districts and teachers should approach content and describing what students should learn and how it might be taught. Each grade/course opens with overarching questions, which are followed by subsections that address those questions. In more advanced grades, those subsections focus on chronological or thematic topics and have their own, more specific inquiry questions. Examples of possible classroom exercises are set apart in boxes.

Civics: A-

In Brief

California’s civics standards are exemplary. Faced with an infinite amount of material and a finite number of instructional hours, the state has consistently chosen the topics most essential to students’ understanding of the origin and structure of American government, the issues that have tested that framework, and the opportunities to realize and shape its ideals moving forward. The standards are written for “the most diverse population of students in the country,” with the goal of having them understand “the value, the importance and the fragility of democratic institutions”—a goal that is timely because it is timeless.

Content and Rigor: 6/7

K-8

Kindergarten introduces children to civic symbols such as the national and state flags, the bald eagle and Statue of Liberty, the people and events that are honored by holidays, the “human struggles” that were the basis for those events, and other heroes such as Pocahontas, Benjamin Franklin, and Booker T. Washington. In general, the material is thoughtful and age appropriate (though the state may wish to reconsider Daniel Boone as a model, given his record of warfare against Native Americans).

First grade introduces students to the practice and relative advantages of direct and representative democracy and the ubiquity and desirability of rules in their lives. There’s a reasonable balance between *pluribus* and *unum*, as students are exposed to the idea that diverse populations may contribute to the wellbeing of a single political or social community. Meanwhile, the Declaration of Independence and Constitution—and the people and events associated with them—become part of their vocabulary.

In second grade, civics focuses on personal agency. Family history is used to demonstrate the commitment and fortitude that brought ancestors to California. The list of heroes and heroines is expanded to provide additional male and female role models in science, government, civil rights, medicine, and athletics.² By the end of the year, students are expected to be able to explain how the United States and other countries make laws, carry out laws, determine whether laws have been violated, and punish offenders.

Third grade focuses on local and state history and government, tying things together at the end with a first pass at federalism. The stages of law, from creation to application, are associated more firmly with the three branches of government. The unique status of American Indian tribes follows a study of their history. Students are invited to write a “constitution” for their class containing rules of behavior and are expected to explain the “reasons for rules, laws, and the U.S. Constitution.”

Fourth grade—which focuses on the history of California—abounds with opportunities for civics education, many of which the standards leverage. However, although the course description calls for a comparison of the state’s first government and its government during the Spanish and Mexican periods, it provides no guidance on contemporary Spanish and Mexican governments, which are an opportunity to explore themes such as monarchy, an established church, property ownership, representation, and elections. An extra bullet point on the wealth and power of the railroad interests after 1870 would also create an opportunity to connect the past to the present day and teach a host of civics lessons.³

Finally, the civics content in fifth grade is the byproduct of studying American history from pre-Columbian times to 1850, a period that includes the drafting of the Declaration

of Independence, the failure of the Articles of Confederation, the compromises of the Constitutional Convention, debates between Federalists and anti-Federalists, and the adoption of the Bill of Rights. Again, the strength of the material, which includes references to the separation of powers, the Great Compromise, and the 3/5ths clause, as well as specific powers of Congress enumerated in Article 1, Section 8, makes any feedback an exercise in nitpicking. However, the course description does err by suggesting that the Northwest Ordinance was a product of the Constitutional Convention (page 117), and a discussion of treaties might benefit from knowing the treaty provisions in Article II, Sec 2 of the Constitution.

Sixth grade takes the civics student to world history from Paleolithic times to 300 CE, thereby covering prehistoric cultures, the Middle East, Greece through the Hellenistic period, India until Asoka, China through the Han dynasty, and Rome until its decline. Again, the content standards do a good job of identifying the key topics and themes for civics purposes, but the course description should provide more guidance. For example, students are expected to “know the significance of Hammurabi’s Code,” but that significance should be outlined. The contribution of the Greeks to political institutions is well covered. However, the standards err in suggesting that the Roman Republic had a written constitution.⁴ Finally, asking sixth-grade teachers to know and students to learn “the enduring contributions of ... Plato [and] Aristotle” and “the [legacy] of Roman ... law” is a tall order without a primer on the philosophers and the difference between Roman and Anglo-American law, so some additional thought should be given to what sixth-grade students can reasonably be expected to learn about this material.

Civics in seventh grade is learned from the study of world history from 500 CE to 1789 CE, a period that witnessed the disintegration of Roman Empire and the divergent histories of its eastern and western parts, as well as the rise of Islamic, Chinese, sub-Saharan African, Japanese, Meso-American, and Andean civilizations (all of which are covered). Again, even more guidance could be provided. For example, the treatment of medieval Europe does a good job of pointing out the importance of physical geography and the role of feudal relationships in providing the foundation of political

order but is shallow in mentioning *Magna Carta* without explaining its contours (e.g., its emphasis on property, consent, due process, proportional justice, and relief from executive abuse, as opposed to free speech, religious exercise, or the rights of women and Jews). Similarly, the framework should note that the end of the religious wars in 1648 marks the emergence of the state as a political unit with defined boundaries and citizens—the subject of modern political science—and should probably say something about Machiavelli’s modern approach to power. However, the remainder of the seventh-grade course is excellent, appropriately highlighting the connections between *Magna Carta* and the Declaration of Independence, between the Reformation and subsequent theories of self-government, between the Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment, and between Locke and Montesquieu and the American Founders.

Commendably, the eighth-grade course on U.S. History from the Founding until 1914 revisits the Founders’ heritage of English rights and institutions, the influence of the Great Awakening, and the ideas in the Declaration of Independence before delving into the early state constitutions and Articles of Confederation (though the course description oversimplifies when it states that under the Articles, Congress had no power to regulate commerce and the United States lacked a national judiciary).⁵ The framework hits its stride when it turns to the Constitution, ratification debates, Federalist Papers, Bill of Rights, policy differences between Jefferson and Hamilton, and speeches articulating different visions for the new nation. Still, there are places where it could be improved. For example, it states that the only “major debate” at the Philadelphia Convention had to do with slavery. Yet the representation of states in Congress and selection and powers of the President were equally contentious and should be noted. Finally, the course description mentions the “compromises” that kept the union together but should also mention the decision that removed the possibility of any compromise: *Dred Scott v. Sandford* (1857), although Reconstruction and the Reconstruction Amendments are very well handled, as are the different aspects of American economic, political, and social growth to the turn of the century.

High School

Ninth grade, which is an opportunity for students to choose electives in California, is beyond the scope of this review. However, a few comments about the tenth- and eleventh-grade material are in order.

From a civics standpoint, the tenth-grade course material is excellent. It flags the emergence of the nation-state after the Enlightenment. It puts the American Revolution in the context of other revolutions and links the end of empires with the emergence of new states that confront the same nation-building problems the United State experienced in far more difficult circumstances. It focuses on the disappearance of life, liberty, and property in the Holocaust and the application of international standards to hold leading Nazis responsible afterwards. Finally, it draws attention to the modern political, economic, and technological developments that challenge the state as a unit of analysis.

The U.S. History course in eleventh grade is equally valuable. It begins, again, with a review of the Enlightenment, American Revolution, Constitution, and Civil War and Reconstruction. It includes the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Amendments of the Progressive Era (though it misses the Seventeenth Amendment), as well as the civil liberty issues that arose during both world wars, the increasing importance of the federal government with its power to spend as well as regulate, the emergence of California as an economic and educational powerhouse as a result of that largesse, and an excellent unit on the Civil Rights movement. Finally, it concludes with a thoughtful unit on the major social problems and domestic policy issues in American society as of 2015. Thus, all that is truly required from a civics perspective is to update the list of issues to address the new and arguably greater challenges the United States has faced in recent years—including the rise of disinformation and political polarization, the disruption of longstanding norms, new and potentially more virulent forms of autocracy, and the collective-action problems posed by global disease and climate change.

As noted in the course description, the twelfth-grade “Principles of Democracy” course is traditionally taught in one semester. However, “given the importance and breadth of this content area, teachers may want to expand it into a yearlong course”—which they should, with the support of administrators and districts.

The class begins with a further review of the Greek, Roman, English, and Continental political thinkers who influenced the development of American government before turning to the insights of Alexis de Tocqueville. After this come excellent sections, more sophisticated than in previous years, on the contending principles in the Constitution, the Founders’ view of human nature, and the most important Federalist Papers. However, two inaccuracies should be corrected: First, the Bill of Rights limits the federal government, not state governments (although the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment “incorporates” some of the Bill of Rights). Second, the Equal Protection Clause protects all persons, not just “citizens” (although in some areas it permits citizens to be treated differently from noncitizens).

Next come an interesting pair of sections that focus on the individual. The first deals with the legal rights and

Strengths & Weaknesses of the California Civics Standards

Strengths

1. Nearly all key ideas, events, and issues relevant to civics education are covered.
2. The explanatory depth offered by the curriculum framework is unparalleled.
3. The framework is very well written.
4. Overall organization is clear and user-friendly.
5. The document exhibits an openness to new scholarship and changing world events.

Weaknesses

1. A few key items are missing (e.g., the Seventeenth Amendment).
2. After a tumultuous five years, parts of the framework are already becoming out of date.

obligations of citizens and the second with the rights and responsibilities of members of a civil society. Again, there is much to praise. However, the course description encourages students to discuss their “political liberties,” “economic, social, and cultural freedoms” (e.g., property, labor, and children’s rights), and “rights necessary to basic well-being,” such as subsistence, education, and health. Some of these “rights” are guaranteed by the U.S. or State Constitution, some are creatures of state or federal statute, and some aren’t guaranteed at all. This part of the framework needs to be tightened considerably.

The next group of standards touch on five central features of American democracy: the three branches of government, constitutional interpretation and judicial review, parties and elections, federalism, and the role of media. The first of these sections rightly highlights the difficulty of getting legislation passed, the growth of executive power, and the way Supreme Court justices are selected. The second section appropriately begins with the foundational cases of *Marbury v. Madison* and *McCulloch v. Maryland*, which are followed by later cases that emphasize the importance of constitutional reading to students’ expressive, privacy, academic, family, and recreational interests. However, “judicial activism” and “judicial restraint” are mentioned as if people agree when they apply, which they rarely do. The section on elections provides solid coverage of the most critical nuts and bolts—redistricting, primaries, voting rules, and campaign finance. The federalism topics are also good but would be improved if they mentioned the Supremacy Clause. Finally, the section on the role of the media should be updated to address the compartmentalization of public opinion by a potent combination of search algorithms, partisan media, and self-selection.

The course ends with a study of comparative government and a survey of contemporary issues, which are well handled given the time constraints. Noteworthy topics include the study of the conditions that give rise to nondemocratic governments and the political history of Latin American countries from which the families of many Californian students come. However, although it does contrast parliamentary systems with “systems of shared powers,” the document could and should say more about the alternatives to “first past the post” elections (e.g., proportional representation and “ranked choice”). In addition, the unit

on the success of relatively new democracies in Africa, Asia, and Latin America could be supplemented by another unit on the rise of powerful antidemocratic regimes in those continents, including China.

Skills and Dispositions

At every stage, the California standards do a good job of cultivating the skills that are essential to informed citizenship. By the time students leave elementary school, they are expected to know the difference between fact and fiction, relevant and irrelevant information, essential and incidental data, cause and effect, and cost and benefit. By eighth grade, they are expected to know the difference between cause and correlation and intended and unintended effects, recognize the influence of interest and point of view, and understand the role of chance and error in human affairs. Finally, by the time they graduate, they should be able to distinguish valid from fallacious arguments, grasp the complexity of causes and effects, evaluate major debates among historians and policy advocates, construct and test their own hypotheses, and be able to present their positions both orally and in writing. These are admirable skills. However, in a society that is increasingly polarized, another skill that should be added to the list for high school students is the capacity to examine one’s own thought processes for evidence of confirmation bias or motivated reasoning.

In the early grades, the framework is appropriately attentive to the development of personal attributes such as honesty, respect, courage, sportsmanship, and rule abidance. However, although it points out opportunities where teachers can have students act for the common good in the classroom, school, or community, the framework does not encourage, let alone expect or require, teachers to develop these norms of behavior. References to service learning do appear in the course descriptions for seventh grade and the high school course on American Democracy, as well as the Appendix devoted to the subject (where the list of features that contribute to its success is particularly excellent). But the standards don’t refer teachers to that appendix as often or with as much conviction as they might.

Finally, American symbols and patriotic songs dot the early grades of California education, and American heroes are repeatedly held out as role models and respect for rule of

law and preservation of the Constitution is encouraged. But what is not encouraged (at least expressly) is the cultivation of a commitment on the part of students to the United States with all its imperfections. The opening to the course description for eighth-grade U.S. History says that “students will view American history through the lens of people who were trying (and are still trying) to fulfill the promises of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution.” The simple message that California hopes that its students will be like those “people”—that they will have the same level of commitment to the American enterprise—does not run through the framework as it might.

Clarity and Organization: 3/3

The civics standards are well organized and extremely well written. The chapters are clearly indexed. The progression of topics is logical, and where material is repeated between grades, the educator is alerted to that fact. With very few exceptions, the purpose of each paragraph and sentence is clear. Furthermore, the document is mercifully free of academic jargon, and there are moments of real style, insight, and economy.

There are places where the standards use an important word or phrase that has more than one accepted meaning, without a definition or warning that will help the teacher help students navigate the nuances. For example, “rule of law” is often understood to mean obedience to law—that is to say, compliance. However, among legal philosophers, it stands for a group of principles that include the notion that laws should be clear, public, and prospective in application (elements of due process) and that, except for good reason, they should apply to, and be enforced against, all persons equally (the essence of equal protection). Moreover, in addition to this “thin” or “formal” definition of rule of law, there is a “thick” definition that says that rule of law requires respect for basic substantive freedoms such as speech, religious exercise, and privacy. It’s not unreasonable to expect middle and high school teachers to know these nuances, but a state standard that uses these important words should explain them.

U.S. History: A-

In Brief

California’s unique expository framework is consistently impressive and often extraordinary, despite a few substantive gaps and flaws and the unfortunate decision to make a single pass through U.S. History over thirteen years of school.

Content and Rigor: 6/7

K-8

The California framework’s expository approach allows for unusual and often remarkable depth, consistently transcending the limits of the simple content outlines provided by most states—despite a few flaws.

Early grades focus on conventional concepts such as chronology, location in space and time, continuity and change, and national symbols/holidays—though the expository approach allows these concepts to be unpacked in unusual depth, including discussion of national identity/diversity and recommendations of specific informational texts. “Historical empathy”—understanding the past on its own terms—and use of primary sources are urged as early as grade 1. The narrative for second grade urges teachers to focus on biographies of significant individuals (with suggested examples) and to have students cite evidence and write reports, a promising sign that California takes written exposition more seriously than most states. Grade 3 discusses historical motivations (e.g., why did people settle in California?), local American Indians (referring teachers to local museums for specifics), concepts of cultural evolution, and “American heroes” (with possible examples including Anne Hutchinson, Thomas Jefferson, and Martin Luther King Jr.). Concepts are prioritized over specific historical content until grade 4’s survey of California history, from precontact to the present. Here, the level of coverage is remarkable for the age range, and again the expository approach allows for often-unique levels of explanatory depth—even invoking national issues such as California’s role in the Compromise of 1850. Fourth grade teachers may find it difficult to cover all of this content, but they should still make the attempt.

Grade 5 begins California’s U.S. History sequence—a single survey across grades 5, 8, and 11—by covering the time period from pre-contact native cultures to 1800, and the expository approach is again frequently remarkable. Despite some specific flaws and omissions, substantive content coverage often goes well beyond what an outline could achieve (and beyond what can be discussed in a short review). Native American lifeways, the drive behind European exploration and colonization, and settler-Indian relations are discussed solidly and for the most part evenhandedly, including discussion of historical tensions between Indian peoples. British regional settlement patterns are covered in impressive detail, as are the establishment and entrenchment of slavery and the rise of representative government. At times, the focus on past injustices can seem a touch tendentious, but the overall emphasis on seeing the past in its own context outweighs such moments.

Unfortunately, much of the later Colonial period is skipped, including some important economic, religious, and political developments. In-depth coverage resumes with the American Revolution, where British arguments for taxing the colonies are well explained, but discussion of *why* colonists objected to those taxes (*why* they saw representation as necessary for taxation) is disappointingly thin. Still, the emphasis on historical contingency—for instance, that the colonists did not see themselves as heading toward independence until 1776—is commendable, as is the expectation that students understand the formative power of Revolutionary ideas and not simply reject them for their retrospective shortcomings. The role of women in the Revolution is also covered well, as are the Articles of Confederation and Constitutional Convention (though the Northwest Ordinance, a product of Congress under the Articles, is wrongly tied to the Convention). Final sections then look ahead to grade 8, discussing life in the new republic and westward expansion.

After grades 6 and 7 cover ancient and early modern world history, grade 8 resumes the U.S. History sequence, continuing to the late nineteenth century. The grade 8 narrative starts off strong: the framing introduction expects students to “view American history through the lens of people who were trying—and are still trying—to fulfill the promise of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution” and to understand that definitions of freedom, equality, and liberty change over time. However, although

the grade 8 framework suggests a “brief review” of major Colonial-era issues, nothing is outlined, meaning that serious study of the formative Colonial period is entrusted to grade 5—a significant flaw. Fortunately, the Revolution is recapped in greater depth (curiously invoking the Great Awakening, which is absent from grade 5), though Colonial objections to British taxation still aren’t explained. The creation of the federal government is also recapitulated in some depth, pointing to issues such as fears of centralized tyranny, growing divisions over slavery, the place of women, and the achievements of the Constitution. However, truly in-depth coverage doesn’t begin until the 1790s. Here, the importance of Washington’s presidency could use more space. Still, the Jefferson-Hamilton schism is examined at length, pointing to specific documents teachers and students should explore. Discussion of federal powers then leads into westward expansion (including points such as the disputed constitutionality of the Louisiana Purchase) and diverse experiences of daily life.

“The Divergent Paths of the American People” from 1800 to 1850 are discussed with often remarkable sophistication and depth, along with key concepts such as context and contingency. Industrialization, immigration, the Second Great Awakening, reform movements, and the renewed growth of slavery are all discussed and explained—though the coverage does have some problems. Perhaps most important, discussion of the period is organized by region (Northeast, South, and West). However, this somewhat rigid division squeezes out some broader national issues (such as the Marshall Court, though *Marbury v. Madison* is mentioned in discussion of the Constitution) while forcing others into awkward boxes (for example, coverage of Jacksonian democracy appears in the section on the West because of Jackson’s connection with the frontier). Furthermore, although abolitionism is correctly discussed as a small and much-maligned movement, the “free-soil” antislavery ideology that dominated the North is not sufficiently explained (though its crucial emphasis on barring slavery from the territories is noted).

Coverage of subsequent periods is similarly strong, though not perfect. Major sectional crises before 1850 are discussed in the section on the coming of the Civil War, but they could use more space, and chronology would be better served if they appeared earlier. Coverage of the Civil War’s outbreak is generally impressive—though the prominent

claim that the war was unpopular among northerners from the start is highly debatable—and coverage of the shift toward emancipation as a war aim is also strong. However, coverage of Reconstruction is rushed compared to much of the framework, though it still includes more depth and explanation than the outlines provided by most other states.

Postwar industrialization, immigration, westward expansion, Progressivism, Populism, and a glance at global expansion to 1914 are broadly covered in a final, quite sophisticated overview that looks ahead to grade 11.

High School

Grade 11 addresses the final part of the U.S. History sequence, from the late nineteenth century to the beginning of the twenty-first century. The course opens with “a selective review” of the evolution of the American nation (which is also tied to the coverage of the Enlightenment and democratic ideas in tenth-grade world history) through the Civil War. As in previous grades, the overall narrative is consistently solid and often exceptional, despite some specific shortcomings. For example, the rise of segregation is correctly linked to the decay of Reconstruction and the judicial undercutting of the Reconstruction Amendments. However, figures such as W.E.B. Du Bois are noted out of chronological sequence, and the discussion could use more detail (“separate but equal” is quoted, but *Plessy v. Ferguson*, mentioned in grade 8’s coverage of Reconstruction and its aftermath, isn’t named). The main post-Civil War section covers industrialization/urbanization, agricultural Populism (in particularly unusual detail), immigration, social change, Progressivism, and women’s suffrage, among other topics. More detail on the labor movement and specific Progressive reforms/amendments would be helpful, but the level of substantive explanation remains impressive. Notably, this section also introduces LGBT history, in the context of urban social change. California’s mandate for LGBT history content sparked political controversy, but the subject is well contextualized and integrated in the framework.

A subsequent section on America’s rise as a world power again refers back to grade 10’s world history coverage before tracing the U.S. perspective. Coverage of U.S. intervention in WWI is disappointingly brief and general, but discussion of the home front is notably stronger (though the Red Scare and Palmer Raids are wrongly dissociated from the Sedition Act

and deferred to the section on the 1920s). Coverage of the 1920s is exceedingly thorough, including cultural changes, Prohibition, internal migration, the Harlem Renaissance, LGBT culture, rural crises, political conservatism, racism and the Klan, immigration restriction, and ongoing anti-Communism. Discussion of the 1929 collapse and its causes is likewise admirably sophisticated (though Hoover’s belated relief efforts are not noted). The New Deal is well

Strengths & Weaknesses of the California Civics Standards

Strengths

1. The California framework’s expository approach allows for far greater substantive and explanatory depth than any outline could achieve.
2. The expository approach also allows for deeper exploration and explication of history-related skills (including comprehension of the past in its original context).
3. The grade-level course descriptions point to specific primary and secondary texts and suggest their incorporation into instruction.
4. The framework generally maintains a balanced tone, while incorporating specific diversity elements mandated by the state.

Weaknesses

1. The decision to make a single pass through U.S. History means the Colonial era is largely relegated to grade 5, while topics such as World War II aren’t introduced until high school.
2. Despite the strengths of the framework’s expository narratives, there are a few thin spots.

summarized, as are the controversies it spurred; rural poverty, labor activism, and the racism of the period, including the Mexican Repatriation Program, are discussed (though racial disparities in the New Deal’s benefits are not).

Coverage of WWII invokes grade 10’s coverage of European and Japanese dictatorships before discussing isolationism and FDR’s interventionism, moving quickly to Pearl Harbor and war. Because grade 10 emphasized the war in Europe, grade 11 focuses more on the Pacific (though U.S. response to the Holocaust is also discussed). Commendably, the narrative specifically urges balanced consideration of the atomic bomb decision, and the wartime home front is discussed at length, including the Japanese internment, detention of German and Italian nationals (correctly distinguished from the widespread internment of Japanese American U.S. citizens), racial and LGBT issues, and *bracero* labor, among other topics.

The section on the postwar era arguably exaggerates the political consensus of the period, though it acknowledges the ideological schism that widened in the 1960s. Discussion of the Cold War properly emphasizes communism’s genuine authoritarian threat, moving to containment in theory and practice, though discussion of Korea and other Cold War hot spots is somewhat rushed. The Red Scare/McCarthyism receives balanced discussion, including blacklisting and the anti-LGBT “Lavender Scare.” Coverage of postwar prosperity, educational gains, suburbanization, racial disparities, and the growing feminist movement leads into detailed discussion of the Civil Rights movement, plus Latino, LGBT, and other reform movements (jumping ahead to the 2010s), before the narrative turns back to the Cold War with Vietnam and its domestic impact.

A final section on “Contemporary American Society” covers the period from the 1970s to the present. As is the case in many states, this final period is comparatively rushed and somewhat jumbled chronologically—though, again, even the “rushed” parts of the California framework usually include more substantive depth than one finds in most states. Coverage of the 1970s is undeniably skimpy. Coverage of Reagan and the New Right is cogent and generally balanced, but the end of the Cold War needs more explanation. Final pages discuss controversies over globalization, immigration, diversity, inequality, and the ongoing tension between

prosperity/stability and continued social injustices, all with solid explanatory depth (further expanded upon in Appendix D, “Teaching the Contemporary World”).

Skills Development

As noted previously, in addition to historical concepts embedded in the expository course narratives (such as historical contingency and context, as well as specific primary and secondary sources), California offers separate expository chapters on “instructional practice” for grade bands K–5, 6–8, and 9–12, covering “disciplinary and literacy practices,” including “investigation, close reading, analysis of evidence, and argumentative writing.”

This skills coverage is consistently impressive and ambitious. History-related skills for K–5 stress chronology and causality, basic use/evaluation of sources, and historical perspective. Literacy skills in reading/writing for social studies focus on understanding and evaluation of informational texts, written presentation of opinion/information, and the development of research skills (developmental gradations across the grade band are discussed in some detail). History skills for grades 6–8 ask for greater sophistication in evaluating the credibility, relevance, and intended audience of sources and greater analysis of past perspectives. Literacy skills introduce argumentation and build on analysis of evidence, comparison of sources, authorial point of view, distinguishing fact from opinion, and comparing primary and secondary sources on the same topics. The importance of reading skills for all students is stressed. Writing skills emphasize further sophistication in making and comparing arguments, and students are expected to engage in more advanced research projects. History skills for 9–12 stress comprehension of historical context and avoidance of presentism and introduce critical analysis of secondary literature. Literacy skills further develop textual analysis and emphasize the importance of specific content knowledge, while an increasingly high bar is set for written work and research projects, including use of multiple sources and use of footnotes/endnotes.

Further discussion of skills—including concepts of historical comprehension—appears in later chapters on “instructional strategies” and “assessment of proficiency in history-social science” and an appendix on “capacities of literate individuals.”

Clarity and Organization: 3/3

California’s framework is very different from other states’ standards documents, but different can be good. Despite some avoidable thin spots, the expository approach allows for substantially greater depth than any outline could achieve. Furthermore, as noted in the Civics section of this review, the document is a model of clarity, with a straightforward table of contents, easily located grade-by-grade content, and professional formatting. Although its considerable length is intimidating at first glance, the content for particular grades or subjects is entirely manageable. Finally, the grade/subject and chapter number/appendix letter is indicated on every page, making it easy to keep one’s place. In short, California’s framework document is ambitious, unconventional, and highly successful in presenting information clearly for teachers and districts.

One small but annoying oversight is the omission of date ranges from the titles of U.S. History courses. However, chronological scope is directly specified in the introductory material for each course, and the overarching U.S. History sequence is quite clear. Indeed, the least-satisfactory feature of the California U.S. History standards is the state’s decision to cover U.S. History only once across grades 5, 8, and 11. While later grades selectively review earlier material, including the Revolution and founding era, the formative Colonial period is largely relegated to grade 5, when children may be too young to absorb or retain the full significance of what is being covered. A grade 8 reference to “what students remember from their fifth-grade study of early American history” highlights the problem, which the existing sequence leaves unsolved.

Recommendations

Civics

1. **Add the expectation that students critically examine their own thinking** (e.g., by using their knowledge of confirmation bias to critique their understanding of the facts).
2. **Address the other minor errors and oversights noted in the review.**

U.S. History

1. **Consider developing an alternative U.S. History sequence** wherein the grade 5 course is a basic introductory survey, with a more advanced full survey offered in later grades.
2. **Address the occasional content gaps in the next revision of the framework.**

Both subjects

1. **Preserve the considerable strengths of the current framework in any future revisions.**

Documents Reviewed

- “California Department of Education History-Social Science Framework,” 2016, <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/hs/cf/hssframework.asp>
- “California Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects,” 2013, <https://www.cde.ca.gov/be/st/ss/documents/finalelaccsstandards.pdf>

ENDNOTES

1. Appendix C presents the original 1998 standards.
2. Yuri Kochiyama, an advocate for social change, tolerance for Muslims, and reparations for Japanese Americans who were interned during WWII, may draw criticism for her later support of the Revolutionary Action Movement and Osama bin Laden. Minoru Yasui, who suffered a similar wartime experience, took his case to the Supreme Court, and devoted his life to tolerance, might be substituted.
3. There is a straight line between the Southern Pacific Railroad, the “Big Four,” monopoly control of the state economy and legislature, the state constitution of 1879, the Direct Legislation League, adoption of the initiative, Proposition 13, and the eighth-longest constitution in the world.
4. The Twelve Tables were a written code covering a subset of private relations for a period of time, but government practice was a mix of uncoded custom and precedent akin to the present constitution of the United Kingdom.
5. In fact, under Article IX of the Articles, Congress did have the power to regulate commerce with foreign nations by treaty, establish trial courts for piracies and felonies on the high seas, create an appellate court in capture cases, and appoint a judicial panel to decide land disputes between states and between persons claiming title under grants from different states. Because these were national courts, the difference between them and the Supreme Court of the Constitution is the scope of jurisdiction.

Colorado

A	Exemplary	10
	Standards worthy of implementation	9
B	Good	8
	Targeted revisions recommended	7
C	Mediocre	6
	Significant revisions strongly recommended	5
D	Inadequate	4
	Complete revision recommended before implementation	3
2		
0-1		

Civics: D

Content & Rigor: 2/7

Clarity & Organization: 1/3

Total Score: 3/10

U.S. History: D

Content & Rigor: 2/7

Clarity & Organization: 1/3

Total Score: 3/10

Overview

Colorado's civics and U.S. History standards are inadequate. In general, they fail to specifically reference essential content, and the sporadic lists of persons or events that accompany the broad grade-level expectations don't delineate a proper scope or sequence. A complete revision of the standards is recommended.

Description of the Standards

Colorado provides social studies standards for individual grades pre-K-8 and for the high school grade band (grades 9-12), all of which are divided into four strands: history, geography, economics, and civics. Each strand includes more specific grade-level expectations (GLEs), and each GLE specifies a topic or theme and is further divided into "Evidence Outcomes" and "Academic Context and Connections." The former are content standards, and the latter are skills standards, subdivided into "essential skills," "inquiry questions" (examining issues in the Evidence Outcomes), "nature and skills," and "disciplinary, information, and media literacy" skills.

Notably, Colorado requires just one high school course on state and national history and government.

Civics: D

In Brief

More isn't always better, as Colorado demonstrates in 124 visually busy and highly redundant pages that relentlessly emphasize skills at the expense of knowledge.

Content and Rigor: 2/7

Preschool–Grade 8

Colorado's civics standards come closest to including grade-appropriate content in the early grades but rarely dial up the rigor in the later grades. To wit, Kindergarten students are expected to “differentiate among examples of civic participation. For example: voting, debating, running for office, protesting, and volunteering.” Similarly, high schoolers are to “assess how members of a civil society can impact public policy on local, state, tribal, national, or international issues. For example: voting, participation in primaries and general elections, and contact with elected officials.”

Arguably, the following first-grade standard contains more concrete examples than any other civics standard in the document: “Identify and explain the meaning of various civic symbols important to diverse community groups. For example: the American flag, the National Anthem, Statue of Liberty, Mount Rushmore, Crazy Horse Memorial, Liberty Bell, and a yellow sash (i.e., for women's rights)” (SS.1.4.2). Yet in the later elementary grades and throughout the middle grades and high school, Colorado often trades specific content for vague exhortations. In fact, nearly all items in those grade levels would benefit from the addition of specific examples. For example, fourth graders are expected to “identify important personal rights in a democratic society and how they relate to others' rights” (SS.3.4.1), but the standard doesn't say *which* rights. Similarly, fifth graders are to “describe how the decisions of the national government affect local and state government” (SS.5.4.21), which could mean anything from the Supremacy Clause to the expansion of Medicaid. And sixth graders who are asked to “describe different systems of government in the Western Hemisphere” (SS.6.4.21) could theoretically write several books on that topic. Finally, eighth-grade students are expected to

“evaluate the strengths of rule of law” (SS.8.4.2), but those strengths, like so much else, don't go without saying.

In general, the nuggets of good content that are sometimes found in each grade's Evidence Outcomes are obscured by the Colorado essential skills, inquiry questions, nature and skills of civics, and disciplinary, information, and media literacy clogging each page.

High School

High school is where the holes in Colorado's content are most glaring. When content is presented, it's often peripheral to the core concepts and facts that a high school civics course *ought* to present. For example, students are expected to “examine how people in other systems of government can participate to influence policy” (SS.HS.4.32). Furthermore, key content is often shortchanged. For example, the only high school standard that deals with the judiciary suggests that students “understand the role of the American judicial system and evaluate the effectiveness of the justice system in protecting life, liberty, and property for all persons in the United States” (SS.HS.4.2). At a minimum, students should understand the power of the courts to interpret law and how judicial review can secure rights and rein in legislative and executive power, as well as how federal judges are nominated and confirmed and how their own state's judges assume (and retain) office. They should also understand the distinction between civil and criminal law, know how lawsuits begin, and have a basic sense of how trials proceed and appeals are decided. All of this is potentially included in “the role of the judicial system,” but the specific elements don't go without saying.

Perhaps the most specific high school standard asks students to “analyze the impact of federal policies on campaigns and elections, and why these policies are debated by multiple parties on the political spectrum. For example: PACs, campaign finance, state and federal voting laws and regulations, and the Federal Election Commission” (SS.HS.4.3). Does Colorado really believe that the FEC is core high school content but topics such as due process, federalism, equal protection, and the role of the myriad other regulatory agencies are not?

Skills and Dispositions

Most of the Colorado standards document is devoted to skills, and in general these are sensible. For example,

seventh graders are to “summarize the points an author/ speaker makes and explain how each claim is supported by reasons and evidence” (SS.7.4.1), while high school students are expected to “delineate a speaker’s argument, identify specific claims, and distinguish if claims are supported by reasons and evidence” (HS.4.8.2). Commendably, high school students are also expected to “analyze and explain the importance of the principles of democracy and the inherent competition among values. For example: freedom and security, individual rights and common good, general welfare, and rights and responsibilities” (SS.HS.4.2). Examining these tensions and trade-offs—ideally through well-chosen examples or case studies—is the sort of activity that produces thoughtful citizens.

Colorado also repeatedly and explicitly addresses civic dispositions, typically (though not always) under the “nature and skills of civics” subheading. For example, fourth graders are told that “civic-minded individuals collaborate to responsibly advocate for the ideas they think will improve society. For example: a group lobbies the city council to create a new park or employ more firefighters” (SS.2.4.1). Similarly, high school students are told that “civic-minded individuals write letters to stakeholders using logical reasoning with relevant, accurate data and evidence to influence policy” and that they “can listen to

multiple perspectives in a respectful manner, as part of civil discourse” (SS.HS.4.1). In general, these statements capture the spirit of civic education, so it’s unfortunate that they aren’t accompanied by more specific content.

Clarity and Organization: 1/3

Colorado’s social studies standards are overcomplicated, with far too many divisions and subcategories, many of which are heavy on jargon and light on meaning. For example, the Evidence Outcomes often sound quite similar to the expectations under Academic Context and Connections. Moreover, it seems unnecessary to subdivide the “skills” included in the latter into Colorado essential skills, nature and skills of civics, and disciplinary, information, and media literacy. To be useful, standards must be user-friendly, but the obsession with dubious subclassification makes Colorado’s anything but.

U.S. History: D

In Brief

Colorado’s U.S. History standards are complicated, confusing, and very light on actual history. What little guidance they do provide is usually too vague and broad to be useful—especially in higher grades.

Content and Rigor: 2/7

Preschool–Grade 8

Early grades focus on concepts of chronology and the distinction between primary and secondary sources. However, actual historical content is essentially absent until grade 4, which turns very broadly to Colorado history.

The state’s single U.S. History sequence begins in grade 5, which covers the time period from colonization to the Constitution. The first grade 5 GLE directs students to “analyze primary and secondary sources from multiple points of view to develop an understanding of early United States history,” but the content to support this expectation

Strengths & Weaknesses of the Colorado Civics Standards

Strengths

1. The content for early grades is generally age appropriate and often quite specific.

Weaknesses

1. Many standards are too broad and vague to provide useful guidance.
2. Most essential content is missing at the high school level.
3. Organization is needlessly complex and confusing.

is extremely thin. The second grade 5 GLE invokes “historical eras, individuals, groups, ideas, and themes,” but few such specifics are actually described. A handful of directives point to absurdly vast issues such as “significant individuals and groups of American Indians and European colonists before the American Revolution” (SS.5.1.2) or “the development of political, social, and economic institutions in the British American colonies” (also part of SS.5.1.2). The handful of inquiry questions raise some broad points about the period, but nothing remotely approaches a content outline for the era.

After two years of world history, in grades 6 and 7, coverage of U.S. History resumes in grade 8, which covers the period from the American Revolution through Reconstruction (problematically, the Colonial period is never revisited.) The two grade 8 history GLEs again ask students to use primary and secondary sources to formulate a point of view and to invoke eras, individuals, groups, and so on to study this period. But content coverage is only marginally more substantive than in the early grades. The Evidence Outcomes under the first grade 8 GLE mention analyzing “specific events” but include none. The Evidence Outcomes under the second grade 8 GLE likewise remain broad and general, referencing “continuity and change” across “various eras,” “factors that motivated the military and economic expansion” across the era, general invocations of “gender, age, ethnicity, and class,” and “causes and effects of major conflicts.” The closest the standards come to actual historical outlining is invocation of a few scattered issues, such as grievances against Parliament, the Constitutional Convention, causes and effects of the Civil War, as well as a smattering of “ideas” such as democracy, federalism, capitalism, abolition, and expansionism.

High School

As noted in the civics portion of this review, the high school standards don’t define individual courses. Instead, content is again organized into strands. The history strand consists of three GLEs covering general historical inquiry, U.S. History from Reconstruction to the present, and world history since the Renaissance (the first is presumably meant to be used with both U.S. History and world history, but that is not expressly stated).

The single GLE devoted to U.S. History offers just nine Evidence Outcomes for the entire era, including “causes and

effects of significant events,” “the complexity of events,” the development of political thought, and “ideas critical to the understanding of American history.” Eight of these Outcomes offer specific examples, though they are often scattered and out of context. The “complexity of events” item, for instance, lists “the Civil Rights Movement, migration, immigration and displacement, mass media, landmark Supreme Court cases, and the war on terror.” Similarly, the list to support political thought includes “Populism, Progressivism, isolationism, imperialism, anti-communism, environmentalism, liberalism, fundamentalism, and conservatism.” Other items mention suffrage, activism, racism, “social movements,” and “the role of government.” There is no chronology and no semblance of a coherent outline of historical content, nor is there much additional substance in the inquiry questions, most of which are extremely general (such as, “What ideas have united the American people over time?”) or hypothetical (such as, “What if the Declaration of Independence hadn’t stated that ‘all men are created equal?’”).

Skills Development

Colorado’s standards document devotes far more space to history-related skills than it does to historical content. However, the skills themselves are split confusingly between different sections of the standards, and even within each

Strengths & Weaknesses of the Colorado U.S. History Standards

Strengths

1. There is considerable emphasis on history-related analytical and research skills.

Weaknesses

1. Historical content guidance is extremely thin, thematically scattered, and stripped of context.
2. The Colonial era is relegated to grade 5.
3. The complex organizational structure is needlessly confusing and often redundant.

GLE they are further divided among the Evidence Outcomes (some of which reference historical content, while others are skills centered) and multiple subsections under Academic Context and Connections.

Once located, the history related skills are generally sensible. For example, early grades focus on concepts of chronology, continuity and change, and primary and secondary sources of research. Concepts of historical context, bias, multiple perspectives, and analysis of multiple accounts of the same events are introduced by grade 5. Finally, high school students are asked to construct arguments by analyzing and synthesizing multiple sources, to consider the impact of historians' own viewpoints, and to write research reports based on these skills.

Clarity and Organization: 1/3

As noted in the civics portion of this review, Colorado's standards have a rather confusing organizational structure, with content and skills arbitrarily split among a string of subsections. The history sequence is discernible from the GLEs but is never explained, nor is it explained exactly how the three high school history GLEs (only one of which is specifically devoted to U.S. History) are meant to be translated into actual high school courses. Finally, the sequence itself is flawed, as it relegates the era prior to the Revolutionary War to fifth grade, when students cannot fully appreciate its significance.

Recommendations

Civics

1. **Add more specific references and examples** to the civics content in grades 3–12.
2. **Bolster the high school course** (e.g., by specifically addressing topics such as legislative process, the role of regulatory agencies, due process, federalism, and equal protection).

U.S. History

1. **Strengthen substantive historical coverage** to provide teachers and districts with meaningful content guidance.
2. **Offer two full courses in U.S. History**, one in the elementary grades and a second, more advanced course in high school.

Both Subjects

1. **Provide much more specific content guidance.**
2. **Simplify the organizational structure** to improve clarity and reduce redundancy.
3. **Organize the high school content into distinct courses of study.**
4. **Specifically require that high school students take at least one year of U.S. History and one semester of civics to graduate.**

Documents Reviewed

- “Colorado Academic Standards: Social Studies,” 2020, <https://www.cde.state.co.us/cosocialstudies/2020cas-ss-p12>

Connecticut

A	Exemplary	10
	Standards worthy of implementation	9
B	Good	8
	Targeted revisions recommended	7
C	Mediocre	6
	Significant revisions strongly recommended	5
D	Inadequate	4
	Complete revision recommended before implementation	3
		2
		0-1

Civics: D+

Content & Rigor: 3/7
Clarity & Organization: 1/3
Total Score: 4/10

U.S. History: C-

Content & Rigor: 4/7
Clarity & Organization: 1/3
Total Score: 5/10

Overview

Connecticut’s civics standards are inadequate, and its U.S. History standards are mediocre. In general, the state’s current Social Studies Framework is convoluted and its authors seem reluctant to specify essential content in either discipline. Significant revisions are strongly recommended.

Description of the Standards

Connecticut’s social studies standards provide grade-specific content outlines for grades K-5 and 8, a two-year course across grades 6-7, and high school courses in Civics and Government, Modern World History, and U.S. History. Each grade or course outline opens with an introduction that identifies the content focus, followed by a skills-based outline of Inquiry in the Social Studies (this time organized by grade bands K-2, 3-5, 6-8, and 9-12). Next comes a section that presents themes (conceptual approaches and questions teachers might use) and sample content. This is followed by Dimension 2 (“Applying Disciplinary Concepts and Tools”) from the “inquiry” arc, under which a chart lays out one “primary discipline” and three “supporting disciplines” from among history, civics, economics, and geography. Each of these has at least one subconcept, and each subconcept is supplied with skills-based goals, a sample “compelling question,” and more specific “supporting questions” linked to the grade or course content.

Civics: D+

In Brief

Murky organization compounds a consistent lack of detail—especially in high school, where the lack of rigor is most noticeable. Incredibly, the three branches of the federal government are never specifically called out.

Content and Rigor: 3/7

K–8

Through second grade, Connecticut’s social studies standards give civics equal status with history, economics, and geography. Rules, rights, and responsibilities are introduced in Kindergarten and provide a foundation for talking about civic virtues and persons holding public office in grade 1. The recommended content for second grade includes the “democratic values” of equality, justice, common good, and individual rights.

By grade 3, which calls for the discussion of “key features and structures of state government” and “Connecticut’s contribution to America’s history,” the reader becomes aware that the frameworks consistently avoid detail. For example, there is no mention in the material of Thomas Hooker or the Fundamental Orders of Connecticut, Roger Sherman or the Connecticut Compromise, or Prudence Crandall—or, later on, of significant local cases such as *Griswold v. Connecticut* (1965) and *Kelo v. New London* (2005). Notably, one “supporting question” asks, “How do Connecticut’s legislative, executive, and judicial branches of government work?” However, this is the last mention of the three branches of government.

In fourth grade, there is no specific civics content. The “disciplinary concepts” section suggests that students consider “historical and contemporary means of changing society,” but other than some suggested questions about why different regions of the country interpret laws differently, there is little guidance as to how teachers should approach this sprawling topic.

Fifth grade offers the first of three years of U.S. History (covering human origins to 1776). The framework

recommends that districts cover the “different governmental structures in the colonies,” “different land ownership” rules between indigenous peoples and settlers, the “causes and effects of the French and Indian War,” and the significance of the slogan, “no taxation without representation.” Hidden within these subjects are a multitude of civics concepts, but the state leaves it to school districts or teachers to understand what these are and ensure they get taught. Inexplicably, the Declaration of Independence is not mentioned in the content section. It appears only in two examples of questions that a teacher could ask. Moreover, this is the only time the Declaration is mentioned in a 145-page statement of Connecticut’s best thinking on social studies—an unacceptable treatment of the document that arguably best expresses the American vision.

The Framework for sixth- and seventh-grade World Regional Studies introduces the concepts of human rights, tribal and totalitarian governments, and—by implication—confederal government. However, the omission of Russia from regional studies is odd both historically and as a basis for political comparison.

U.S. History reappears in eighth grade, which covers everything from the Revolutionary War through Reconstruction. The key civics passages somewhat vaguely encourage districts to have students analyze or evaluate “ways the U.S. Constitution reflected American beliefs concerning government and the rights of the individual,” the views of Federalists and anti-Federalists, various long-term and short-term reasons for conflict between the North and South, and “ways that black life in the South changed during ... Reconstruction”—or did not. The suggested topics are suitable for civics instruction but, if chosen, offer no further detail.

High School

The recommended topics for Connecticut’s required course in Civics and Government focus on the structure and function of governments, processes by which laws are made, processes of elections, and the roles of political parties, the media, and public interest groups in shaping elections and policy. Yet there is precious little detail. For example, high school students are expected to “describe the values and principles that are basic to American constitutional democracy as compared to other places in the world,” but no specific values or principles are mentioned. Similarly,

students are expected to “evaluate how laws both shape and reflect characteristics of American society,” but no specific pieces of legislation are suggested. And one truly ambitious standard suggests that they “compare and contrast the effectiveness of different systems and/or levels of government at meeting the needs of its people”—which is functionally meaningless.

The three branches of government make no appearance in the high school civics standards, and the discussion of “rights” consists of a single standard suggesting that students “explain how a government works to balance the rights of the individual with the overall well-being of the society.” The word “federalism” appears only once in the whole standards document (under U.S. History). Concepts that are *never* mentioned in the standards include the separation of powers, checks and balances, judicial review, due process, and equal protection.

Finally, all of the recommended civics content, and all but one of the suggested supporting questions, deal with the present. This might be acceptable if the origins and development of the American political system had previously been established, but there’s no assurance that this was done. To take just one example, the twin pillars of the Constitution and public policy are the common good and individual rights, which trace back to the classical republicanism of ancient Greece and Rome and the natural-rights philosophy of the Enlightenment, respectively. Yet the only time the framework document talks about ancient Greece and Rome, it encourages students to learn about their connection to *European* political structures, and the only time it talks about the Enlightenment, it suggests that students analyze its effect on the revolutions of *Latin America*.

Notable figures who are never mentioned in the document include Locke, Montesquieu, Paine, Franklin, Washington, Adams, Mason, Madison, and Hamilton, as well as Anthony, Douglass, Dubois, and Martin Luther King, Jr. (although the U.S. History course does suggest that students watch a movie about Abraham Lincoln). Notable Supreme Court cases that are never mentioned include *Marbury v. Madison*, *McCulloch v. Maryland*, *Dred Scott v. Sanford*, *Plessy v. Ferguson*, *Brown v. Board of Education*, and *Roe v. Wade*. In fact, the word “court” does not appear in the document.

Skills and Dispositions

Skills relevant to citizenship are found primarily in dimensions 3 and 4 of Connecticut’s “inquiry arc.” In general, the progressions are sound. And it is particularly heartening to see the distinction between facts and opinion, the construction of arguments based on reasons, and the early exploration of ways that people are trying to address local, regional, and global problems. The expectations that third-grade students use evidence from different sources, critique arguments and explanations, and communicate effectively are also welcome. Expertise and motive appear by sixth grade, along with the development of strategies based on power and potential outcome. Understanding a problem based on time and place and the choice between individual and collective action emerge in high school. These are excellent civics skills but difficult to forge sans content. If there were a single recommendation, it would be to include more express references to current events. At the moment, there are none.

Strengths & Weaknesses of the Connecticut Civics Standards

Strengths

1. The standards exhibit a commitment to active learning and preparing students to take informed civic action.

Weaknesses

1. There is a dearth of specific content at all grade levels, especially in high school.
2. Many standards are too vague or broad to provide useful direction.
3. The overly complex and murky structure is a barrier to effective usage.
4. The three branches of the federal government—and the judicial branch in particular—receive almost no coverage in higher grade levels.

Clarity and Organization: 1/3

Connecticut’s social studies standards are a needlessly confusing maze of sections and categories. The pages that relate to each grade are not internally linked or presented in obvious logical order. Themes, content, and disciplinary concepts are all presented separately and without clear linkages. And there is no explanation on the front page of the sequence or organizing principle of the pages that follow.

Confusion is amplified by the fact that the frameworks list concepts that would naturally be part of civics under other headings. For example, at the high school level, “voter turnout” appears in history, “property rights” and “rule of law” appear in economics, and “gerrymandering” appears in geography. These locations make it harder, not easier, for the reader to understand what the state Board of Education recommends for teachers and students in this course.

Finally, the document is full of references to other documents identified by acronyms, concepts shortened to abbreviations, unusual and misleading terms, and section and subsection numbers. As a compliance document, it is probably excellent. However, as a statement to the world, it is almost unreadable.

U.S. History: C-

In Brief

Connecticut’s U.S. History standards offer adequate guidance on many major topics in U.S. History but are seriously undermined by a consistent lack of detail, a flawed grade-by-grade sequence, and needlessly convoluted presentation.

Content and Rigor: 4/7

K–8

As noted in the Civics review, the early grades work outwards—focusing on students and their communities in Kindergarten, wider communities in grade 1, and “making a difference” in grade 2. “Themes and content” and “dimension 2” invoke concepts of chronology, historical evidence,

change over time, and differences between past and present. Monuments, memorials, and holidays are mentioned (sans examples) in grade 2, but no specific historical content appears.

Grade 3 covers state and local history but, again, with little detail. “Indigenous peoples” appear as a content heading but with no specifics. A few key historical markers (the American Revolution, Industrial Revolution, Immigration, Civil War, etc.) are noted as examples of events that connected Connecticut to the nation. Grade 4 then turns to U.S. geography, and the content units broadly note regional geographic influences on historical development.

Grade 5 begins the main U.S. History sequence, covering from indigenous peoples to the Revolution. Suggested organizing themes include the American struggle for freedom, equality, and social justice; cultural diversity and gender roles; the role of Connecticut in U.S. History; and America’s role in the world. Content headings include indigenous life (though, oddly, just in New England), Europe in the 1400s and 1500s, early settlements, thirteen colonies, relations with indigenous peoples, the French and Indian War, and the American Revolution. This seems reasonably promising, but the subsidiary content bullet points are uneven, often lack detail, and fail entirely to identify key individuals (as noted in the Civics portion). “Identify the different governmental structures in the colonies” does not adequately cover the rise of self-governing institutions. “No taxation without representation” is specifically mentioned, but the suggestion to “explore the major events that started the actual conflict between the British and the colonies” is less than helpful. “Supporting questions” under dimension 2 do mention scattered specifics, such as the Mayflower Compact, Boston Massacre, and King Philip’s War, but these are only potential sample questions and are not intended to offer any comprehensive content guidance.

After grades 6 and 7 offer a two-year World Regional Studies course, grade 8 returns to U.S. History, covering the time period from the Revolutionary crisis to Reconstruction. The overarching suggested themes are largely repeated from grade 5. Again, the content headings are reasonably strong, touching on the pre-Revolutionary and Revolutionary eras, the Constitution, state history, slavery, the reform movements, westward expansion, immigration, the Civil War, and Reconstruction. However, the subsidiary bullet

points are largely disappointing. A few items are quite good. For example, students are expected to “evaluate the causes, goals, and outcomes of mid-nineteenth-century reform movements (women’s rights, temperance, education, mental health, and prisons.)” But most are overly broad (e.g., “evaluate the various long-term and short-term reasons for conflict between the North and South”). A handful of specifics—e.g., utopian movements—highlight the absence of many fundamentals. Named individuals are again completely absent; a dimension 2 suggested question about Spielberg’s *Lincoln* is the only reference to the sixteenth president in the document.

High School

The high school U.S. History course completes the sequence, continuing from post-Reconstruction to the present. The suggested themes are again similar to grades 5 and 8. The content column touches on post-Civil War western expansion and industrialization, immigration and migration, the Gilded Age, organized labor, Progressivism, suffrage movements, Civil Rights movements (from the late nineteenth century to 1950), U.S. imperialism and foreign policy, the 1920s and Great Depression, the World Wars, Cold War, modern Civil Rights movement, and contemporary domestic and global issues. This list of topics is reasonably complete, but, as before, the actual content bullet points are rarely specific, more often directing students to learn a given subject than actually providing any core information (e.g., “analyze the main reasons for and responses to the westward movement during the late 1800s,” “analyze cultural changes that occurred during the 1920s and responses to those changes,” and “compare and contrast the Cold War policies of various U.S. presidents”). Named individuals are again entirely absent.

There are occasional moments of greater detail in the content bullet points (laissez-faire capitalism, specific Civil Rights challenges in both pre- and post-1950 periods, and a list of groups affected differently by the New Deal). But such instances are far too limited and erratic to provide any real explanatory depth. Chronology is not always respected; the Equal Rights Amendment appears alongside the original Women’s Suffrage movement. Though divisive political issues since the 1970s are listed in unusual detail, the lack of context makes it little more than a laundry list: without any reference to the rise of the New Right, for example, few of the listed policy divisions have much meaning.

The high school content outline, despite its many flaws and chronic lack of depth, is longer than those for grades 5 or 8 and at least touches on more material. However, this only highlights the state’s fundamentally flawed sequence: only post-Reconstruction periods receive this marginally stronger coverage. Early America is relegated solely to grade 5, and the grade 8 outline is weaker than the high school course.

The dimension 2 study questions do sometimes raise more specific historical points and mention some specific individuals but only in scattered, unsystematic fashion. They make no effort to outline core content.

Skills Development

Due to Connecticut’s heavy reliance on the C3 Framework’s “inquiry arc,” considerable space is given to conceptual skills. From the earliest grades, students are asked to gather relevant information from one or more sources, evaluate sources by distinguishing between facts and opinion, construct and present a reasoned argument, and

Strengths & Weaknesses of the Connecticut U.S. History Standards

Strengths

1. The content section headings broadly outline many key issues in U.S. History.
2. Many valuable historical skills are included, albeit without the content that would bring them to life.

Weaknesses

1. Content guidance is undermined by inadequate detail throughout.
2. Needlessly convoluted organization obscures content and makes the standards document unwieldy.
3. The U.S. History sequence—a single pass through the subject across grade 5, grade 8, and high school—relegates the Colonial Era to grade 5.

so on. By middle school, students are to build on these skills by developing claims and counterclaims, assessing their strengths and weaknesses, evaluating the credibility of sources, and so forth, while further developing skills in presenting their ideas and conclusions.

Although the outlined skills become progressively more sophisticated across grade bands, there are unfortunate gaps in history-related practices. For example, the standards almost completely ignore the concepts of primary and secondary sources, which are mentioned only twice—in grade 5 and in high school U.S. History—amidst the dimension 2 supporting questions. Moreover, secondary sources, and the distinction between them and primary sources, are missing in action. In general, there is heavy emphasis on eye-catching and multimedia presentations (posters, speeches, Internet, social media, etc.), at the expense of vitally important forms such as essays.

Clarity and Organization: 1/3

As noted in the Civics portion of this review, Connecticut’s standards document is an unnecessarily complicated labyrinth of categories, sections, and subsections. Consequently, the barely adequate U.S. History content outlines are unhelpfully buried, which fails to enhance their utility.

The U.S. History sequence is clearly identified in the document, with each grade’s target content plainly labeled in its heading. Yet that sequence is flawed, with early American history relegated to grade 5 and all pre-high-school content presented in even less detail than the high school course.

Recommendations

Civics

1. **Provide much more specific and detailed guidance on the structure of the federal government** (e.g., by giving each branch of government its own discrete and nuanced standard at the high school level and by adding discrete standards on the separation of powers and federalism).

2. **Explicitly address the role of courts and the larger field of criminal justice** (e.g., with discrete high school standards on judicial review and due process that include references to specific Supreme Court cases).
3. **Connect classical and Enlightenment ideas to American government** and pay more attention to the Declaration of Independence.
4. **Put more emphasis on the connection between core content and current issues or events** (e.g., by asking students to use their knowledge of government and history to research and analyze a current issue or problem in their community).

U.S. History

1. **Strengthen content coverage** by adding more specific and explanatory detail to the generally acceptable content section headings.
2. **Improve the U.S. History sequence**, ideally with a full introduction to U.S. History in elementary grades and a more advanced full course in later grades.

Both Subjects

1. **Simplify the organization.**

Documents Reviewed

- “Connecticut Elementary and Secondary Social Studies Frameworks,” 2015, <https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Social-Studies/ssframeworks.pdf?la=en>

Delaware

A	Exemplary	10
	Standards worthy of implementation	9
B	Good	8
	Targeted revisions recommended	7
C	Mediocre	6
	Significant revisions strongly recommended	5
D	Inadequate	4
F	Complete revision recommended before implementation	3
		2
		0-1

Civics: F

Content & Rigor: 1/7

Clarity & Organization: 1/3

Total Score: 2/10

U.S. History: F

Content & Rigor: 1/7

Clarity & Organization: 0/3

Total Score: 1/10

Overview

Delaware's civics and U.S. History standards are inadequate. In general, they are too brief and broad to provide any meaningful direction, and there is no discernible coverage of U.S. History prior to sixth grade. A complete revision is recommended.

Description of the Standards

Delaware divides its social studies standards into four fields: civics, economics, geography, and history. Each field has four "anchor standards." Each anchor standard consists of a short summary paragraph followed by a brief statement of target aims. For all the anchor standards in civics, as well as the first three anchor standards in history, there are lists of targets (concepts, skills, or important facts). In the first three anchor standards, these are grouped by grade band (K-3, 4-5, 6-8, and 9-12) but with a specific grade or grades added to the applicable targets. In history, the fourth anchor standard is divided by grade band but without specific grades assigned, and target lists are also organized by era.

Three additional documents outline "Literacy Standards for History/Social Studies" for grade bands 6-8, 9-10, and 11-12.

Civics: F

In Brief

The civics standards disappoint quickly. The specific learning targets that flesh out the four anchor standards are few in number and too broad to provide meaningful direction.

Content and Rigor: 1/7

K-8

Depending on how one counts, Delaware has between 272 and 800 pages of standards and supporting materials for mathematics. Yet it has less than 1 percent of that—about four pages—for civics, with no links to supporting materials.

As that number suggests, the expectations for Kindergarten through grade 3 are thin, with only one civics-related concept per year. Kindergarten students are to learn group discussion and responsibilities, first-grade students are expected to know about elections and leaders, second graders should understand the importance of respect for other persons and property, and third graders should know that American citizens have both rights and responsibilities.

In fourth and fifth grade, the pace quickens slightly. In fourth grade, students learn that governments have a variety of structures and purposes, that in America these are explained in constitutions, that the U.S. government has three branches, that civic responsibility is important to civil liberty, and basic democratic methods of group decision. In fifth grade, they should know that the U.S. Bill of Rights applies to their lives, that due process requires fairness in the execution and enforcement of laws, and the importance of educating oneself on the candidates and issues of the day.

Sixth grade recycles a standard from fourth grade: that students should understand “why governments have . . . authority to make, enforce, and interpret laws”—that is to say, why governments have legislative, executive, and judicial powers. Seventh grade covers majority rule and minority rights; how “civil rights secure political freedom while property rights secure economic freedom”; and to follow and communicate with elected officials. Finally, eighth-grade students are expected to analyze the structure

and function of federal, state, and local governments; the principles and content of major papers such as the Declaration of Independence, Federalist Papers, and Bill of Rights; and to understand that the responsibilities of citizenship require obedience to law, voting, jury service, and military service if required and public service if chosen.

Although the individual standards are reasonably well written, the lack of detail becomes a real problem as grade level increases. To say that fourth-grade students should know about the three branches of government is fine, but to say that eighth-grade students should study the “principles and content of the Declaration of Independence” without specifying any is a leap of faith. Among those principles and content, for example, can be found the philosophy of John Locke, the concept of natural rights, the language of classical republicanism, Magna Carta, the English Bill of Rights, grievances against the British from 1763–76, and the issue of slavery. An eighth-grade civics standard that lays out such matters would be both more rigorous *and* more helpful to teachers, and similar critiques can be made of the eighth-grade standard calling for an understanding of the principles and contents of the “Constitution . . . Bill of Rights . . . and Federalist Papers.” Standards should be more than the names of documents.

Except for the study of America’s founding documents in eighth grade, the K–8 civics standards are also entirely about today’s government and civics, although the knowledge of where a country began and the sacrifices that were necessary to bring it to its present, still imperfect state is central to the mission of civic education. This might be acceptable if the ground in question were well-covered by the K–8 U.S. History standards. Yet there are major problems there, too (see U.S. History).

Finally, there’s little correlation between Delaware’s civics and history standards. While students are studying the three branches of the U.S. government in fourth-grade civics, they are studying Delaware history. While they are studying the Bill of Rights and due process in fifth-grade Civics, they are studying American demography, immigration, and technology in History.

High School

Rather than providing richer detail regarding the content to be learned in high school, as other states do, Delaware goes

in the opposite direction (perhaps because the state doesn't specifically require any courses in civics or U.S. History at the high school level). In ninth grade, students are expected to know "how the structure and purposes of different governments around the world reflect different ideologies, cultures, values, and histories." And by eleventh grade, they should understand that American government is a "dynamic process which [sic] combines the formal balances of power incorporated in the Constitution with traditions, precedent, and interpretations which have evolved over time," including political parties. Based on these standards, it appears that ninth grade involves a study of comparative government and that by eleventh grade the student should understand that American government is more than what's written in the Constitution. However, both standards are too vague to provide any real direction.

Receiving no mention in the high school standards—or anywhere else in the state's social studies standards—are topics such as federalism, judicial review, Equal Protection, the details of criminal procedure, the Voting Rights Amendments, the growth of the executive branch, the electoral process, the role of the press and social media, and the role of interest groups other than parties. In general, the standards omit the areas of government and law that are most likely to touch the lives of students, quicken their interest in civics, and require them to act as citizens.

Skills and Dispositions

Starting in grade 6, an excellent set of standards for critical thinking skills in social studies are grafted onto Delaware's content standards for civics. In grades 6–8, they call attention to the meaning of words, the presentation of information, the importance of point of view, central ideas, supporting evidence, and the difference between fact and opinion. In grades 9–10, they focus on causation and correlation, viewpoint differences, discipline vocabulary, and quantitative analysis. In grades 11–12, they require the student to acknowledge degrees of certainty, the importance of definitions, and the integration of information from different sources into an effective presentation. The expectation that students use their understanding of confirmation bias to critique their own opinions would be a nice addition.

Delaware also does a good job in the early years of nurturing civic dispositions. The civics standards speak of respect (grades 1 and 2), compromise (grade 4), fairness and individual rights (grade 5), and minority rights (grade 7). Students are encouraged to educate themselves about candidates and issues in grades 5 and 7. A good list of the ways a citizen can help set public policy appears in grade 8. However, the last standard that suggests engagement comes in ninth grade. Perhaps more important, Delaware's standards give no indication that the state wants its students to be personally committed to the preservation of constitutional democracy and the realization of the American ideals of freedom, equality, and justice.

Strengths & Weaknesses of the Delaware Civics Standards

Strengths

1. There is commendable attention to civic dispositions from Kindergarten through ninth grade, and critical thinking skills are well developed from sixth grade on.

Weaknesses

1. Many standards are too broad to provide useful guidance.
2. Most essential content isn't specifically called out.
3. The organization of the standards is a barrier to effective usage.
4. There is little attention to current events, citizenship skills, or civic dispositions in high school.
5. The weakness of the U.S. History standards has unfortunate consequences for civics.

Clarity and Organization: 1/3

The organization of Delaware’s civics standards is weak. They fail to give the reader an overview of what is really being taught in any particular grade, and the presentation of material according to four anchor standards on different pages, each generating grade-band blurbs, breaks up what little content there is. To begin to clarify the picture, the reader has to reverse this distribution and search by grade band (and then guess which anchor standards to look at). There is no apparent sequence from grade to grade or from grade band to grade band. The assignment of grade notations to content within grade bands is not explained. And there is no indication of how much or how little time is to be devoted to the content described.

U.S. History: F

In Brief

Delaware doesn’t have real U.S. History standards. Rather, the state has extremely basic lists of eras amidst poorly organized and unhelpful thematic subunits.

Content and Rigor: 1/7

K-8

Delaware’s history standards occupy just five sparsely filled pages divided across four thematic anchor standards: “employ chronological concepts in analyzing historical phenomena [chronology]”; “gather, examine, and analyze historical data [analysis]”; “interpret historical data [interpretation]”; and “develop historical knowledge of major events and phenomena in world, United States, and Delaware history [content].”

The closest Delaware comes to grade- or grade-band-specific outlining is under the inaptly named “content” anchor standard, which is the only place where the U.S. History sequence is discernible. The K-3 grade band expects students to look at “similarities between families now and in the past” and to “develop an awareness of major events and people in United States and Delaware history”—but the only

topics actually invoked are “immigrants, demographics, [and] ethnic and religious groups”; “important people in our past”; and “different kinds of communities” in Delaware and the U.S.

The 4-5 grade band introduces Delaware history (defined by a simple list of five eras, from precontact Native Americans to the present) and “selected themes” in U.S. History. Demographics/immigration, the development of American government, technological advances, and “important people” are mentioned but not further discussed (unlike the other three anchor standards, the content standard does not assign the subitems to specific grades within the grade bands).

As far as one can tell from this extremely thin document, the state makes no serious attempt to include U.S. History at the elementary level, though most states devote at least some of fourth and/or fifth grade to covering the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. U.S. History proper first appears in the 6-8 grade band, alongside early world history. The U.S. course is meant to cover everything from European contact through Reconstruction, but the only detail is a bare list of five eras: “Three worlds meet (Beginnings to 1620)”; “Colonization and Settlement (1585-1763)”; “Revolution and the New Nation (1754-1820s)”; “Expansion and Reform (1801-1861)”; and “Civil War and Reconstruction (1850-1877).”

That’s it for the so-called “content” anchor standard. The other three anchor standards add nothing of historical substance, focusing (briefly) on concepts of chronology, examination of documents and artifacts, and analytical research skills. The civics strand adds some information on the structure of American government,= but nothing specifically historical, save a reference to the Bill of Rights in grade 5. The separate geography standard mentions the impact of American topography, climate, soils, and vegetation on social development and the physical reasons for settlements and transit routes—but again offers no specifics or historical connections.

High School

The high school history standards, such as they are, have the same format as those for other grades—perhaps because Delaware doesn’t specifically require U.S. History or civics courses at the high school level. Again, the “content” standard provides the only hint of history scope or sequence—both for U.S. and world history, looping back slightly to recap the Civil War and Reconstruction before moving on to the twentieth

and twenty-first centuries. But the only change from the K–8 approach is that there are now six U.S. eras instead of five: “Civil War and Reconstruction (1850–1877);” “Development of an industrialized nation (1870–1900);” “Emergence of modern America (1890–1930);” “Great Depression and World War II (1929–1945);” “Postwar United States (1945–early 1970s);” and “Contemporary United States (1968–present).” That is the extent of historical specifics. Districts and teachers are entirely on their own; the state does nothing else to promote shared exposure to essential content.

Oddly, the “content” standard is mostly skills based and stresses an understanding “of events, people, trends, and other historical phenomena,” urging that “individual periods, regions, or events” be studied in comparative perspective, with “leaders, great works, and pivotal events” balanced against “the everyday life of ordinary people.” Unfortunately, Delaware’s U.S. History standards offer absolutely no substantive guidance towards achieving those aims, even at the high school level. The 9–12 grade bands under the other three anchor standards are again strictly skills focused, and the other three strand documents add little or nothing of historical substance.

Strengths & Weaknesses of the Delaware U.S. History Standards

Strengths

1. The Delaware social studies standards offer a reasonably strong focus on skills.

Weaknesses

1. There is a near-total absence of U.S. History content beyond basic lists of eras.
2. Until grade 5, there is no real attempt to cover U.S. History content.
3. The organization of the standards is a barrier to effective usage.

Skills Development

Delaware’s social studies standards place far more emphasis on skills than on historical substance. The four history anchor standards are strictly or mostly skills focused, though the brief grade-band blurbs don’t go into particular depth on anything. The first three anchor standards look at concepts of chronology, as well as gathering, analyzing, and interpreting historical data. The analysis standard introduces primary and secondary sources in grades 4–5; the credibility, purpose, and perspective of sources in middle school; and differentiating between facts and interpretations in sources in grades 11–12. The interpretation standard asks fifth-grade students to understand why accounts of the same event differ, to compare different historians’ conclusions and use of sources by grade 8, and to contrast competing historical narratives by grades 11 and 12. Yet all of these items are brief and lack any reference to written presentation of research findings.

Three separate documents provide “Literacy Standards for History/Social Studies,” (as noted in the Civics Skills and Dispositions section), for grade bands 6–8, 9–10, and 11–12. Although fairly brief, these extracts successfully point to a number of key skills, including details on identifying an author’s perspective or intent, distinguishing between fact and opinion, comparing primary and secondary sources on the same topic, citing specific evidence to back up an argument, and evaluating authors’ competing claims—though, again, there’s little emphasis on producing written work.

Clarity and Organization:0/3

As described in the Civics section, the organization of Delaware’s social studies standards is inadequate.

For U.S. History, the standards are brief to the point of nonexistence. Sequence is identifiable due to the bare lists of eras provided under the “content” anchor standard, but U.S. History is essentially absent until middle school. Course scope is limited to those same lists of eras, with no detail or substance to define any course. The standards abdicate any meaningful state role in defining essential knowledge or ensuring any fundamental U.S. History education across the state.

Recommendations

Civics

1. Indicate the grades and/or courses where civics or government should be the primary focus.
2. Provide more meaningful and detailed content guidance for all grade levels.

U.S. History

1. Ensure that students make two full passes through U.S. History, one by grade 8 and another in high school.
2. Provide more meaningful and detailed content guidance for all grade levels.

Both subjects

1. Rewrite the content standards by incorporating the best ideas from other states.

Documents Reviewed

- “Delaware State Standards for Social Studies,” K-12: Civic, Economics, History, Geography, 2018, <https://www.doe.k12.de.us/Page/2548>
- “Delaware State Standards for Literacy in History/ Social Studies (Grades 6-12),” 2018, <https://www.doe.k12.de.us/Page/2548>

Revisions to the Delaware social studies standards are currently underway.

District of Columbia

A	Exemplary	10
	Standards worthy of implementation	9
B	Good	8
	Targeted revisions recommended	7
C	Mediocre	6
	Significant revisions strongly recommended	5
D	Inadequate	4
	Complete revision recommended before implementation	3
2		
0-1		

Civics: A-

Content & Rigor: 6/7

Clarity & Organization: 3/3

Total Score: 9/10

U.S. History: A-

Content & Rigor: 6/7

Clarity & Organization: 3/3

Total Score: 9/10

Overview

The District of Columbia’s civics and U.S. History standards are exemplary. Rigorous content, lucid prose, straightforward organization, and an unusually strong commitment to Black History make them abundantly worthy of implementation.

Description of the Standards

The D.C. standards for social studies specify student learning outcomes at every grade level, from pre-K through twelfth grade. Collectively, they cover history, geography, economics, and government/civics, but they don’t list these subjects as separate strands. Instead, history often serves as the medium through which students learn all social studies material (though there is a separate U.S. Government course in twelfth grade). The focus of that history alternates between the District of Columbia (grades 3 and 12), the United States (grades 4, 5, 8, and 11), and the world (Grades 7, 9, and 10). The material is arranged in chronological order and divided into commonly used time periods. A coding system shows the emphasis of each standard: geography (G), economics (E), politics and government (P); religious thought and ideas (R), social impact (S), military action (M), and intellectual thought (I). The standards begin with a set of Guiding Philosophies for “intelligent citizenship” and ten themes and concepts that illuminate the “drama” of history. At the end of each grade band (K-2, 3-5, 6-8, and 9-12) is a list

of history and social sciences analysis skills that should be acquired within that band. The document concludes with a helpful glossary of terms.

Civics: A-

In Brief

In general, the content of the D.C. standards for Civics is excellent, though the volume of material to be covered in high school seems slightly unrealistic.

Content and Rigor: 6/7

K–8

The social studies standards for grades pre-K–2 include a well-graduated introduction to groups and rules, civil society, and national government. For example, first-grade students are expected to know the American flag, the Pledge of Allegiance, national songs and monuments, and the reason for each national holiday. Similarly, second graders learn about the historic presence of indigenous people, immigration, citizenship, the right to vote, and how laws are made, enforced, and applied by courts.

Third-grade Social Studies, which is devoted to the geography and history of the District itself, overflows with civics content. After all, by asking students to know the major monuments and historical sites in the area (3.1 and 3.2), the standards are asking them to understand much of the history that America has chosen to remember. Similarly, by asking students to identify and research outstanding “statements of moral and civic principles” delivered within the city (3.4.5), the standards are asking them to relive some of this country’s most memorable speeches.

The pace accelerates again in fourth and fifth grade, which represent the first of two passes at U.S. History. To wit, the fourth-grade standards expect students to know a multitude of civics concepts, including tribal constitutions, colonial assemblies, the debate between Great Britain and its colonies, key concepts in the Declaration of Independence, the deficiencies and land policies of the

Articles of Confederation, the drafting and ratification of the Constitution, and the institution of slavery. Similarly, the fifth-grade standards expect students to understand how national growth triggered a crisis of representation in Congress, the use of popular sovereignty and other mechanisms to forestall secession, the rationale for secession, the use of amendments and laws to advance Reconstruction and then unwind it, the role of the Federal Government in the Progressive and New Deal eras, the Civil Rights Movement, and issues raised by the environmental, women’s rights, and antiwar movements.

After a largely history-less year of geography and world culture (in sixth grade), the standards for grade 7 begin the first of three tranches of world history (prehistory until 700 C.E.): Hammurabi’s Code is cited for the principle that law should be public and equal. The Judeo-Christian tradition is studied for its emphasis on individual worth, personal responsibility, and justice. Classical Greece and Persia provide an introduction to forms of government, direct democracy, and voting. And the Roman Republic is an early example of the separation of powers, checks and balances, and representative democracy. In every case, the correct civics lessons have been drawn.

Grade 8 begins the second pass at U.S. History, this time starting with colonial settlement. The content is more sophisticated than in fourth grade and includes the major debates at the Constitutional Convention, political philosophy in the Federalist Papers, national commitment to religious liberty, counterpoint between federal power and individual liberties, and debates between Webster and Calhoun over the nature of the Union. However, the standards do not mention judicial review or the decisions in *Marbury v. Madison* (1803) and *McCulloch v. Maryland* (1819) establishing the role of courts and the power of Congress, subjects that are at least as important as other material indicated for eighth grade.

High School

Ninth grade brings the second tranche of world history (700–1800 C.E.) and related civics content, including the feudal origins of property and procedural rights expressed in Magna Carta, the Reformation’s challenge to authority, and the effect of the English Bill of Rights and Enlightenment ideas of Locke, Montesquieu, Jefferson, and Madison on America’s founding documents. Similarly, although tenth-

grade World History (1800 C.E.–present) generally avoids issues that were internal to the United States, the standards do note connections to civics when they arise—American imperialism at the turn of the twentieth century; global regulatory, fiscal, and monetary policy during the Great Depression; and the distinction between totalitarian vs. constitutional governments and one-party vs. multiparty states. Finally, eleventh-grade U.S. History (1877–present) begins with a review of key ideas and institutions from the Enlightenment through Reconstruction (almost all of which are relevant to Civics) before touching on many social and economic developments that drew the attention of laws and courts (though not with particular attention to law). Key civil-rights legislation from the 1960s is mentioned, but the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment is not (and should be).

The twelfth-grade U.S. Government course has a surfeit of excellent material. No less than sixty-three topics, each with multiple subparts, are expected to be taught and assessed in

a single semester. To understand the challenge this presents, consider that the last four standards expect students to complete the following:

- Identify the ideologies, causes, stages, and outcomes of major Mexican, Central American, and South American revolutions in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.
- Identify the forms of illegitimate power that twentieth-century African, Asian, and Latin American dictators used to gain and hold office and the conditions and interests that supported them.
- Describe the ideologies that give rise to communism, methods of maintaining control, and the movements to overthrow such governments in Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Poland, including the roles of individuals (e.g., Alexander Solzhenitsyn, Pope John Paul II, Lech Walesa, and Vaclav Havel).
- Identify the successes of relatively new democracies in Africa, Asia, and Latin America and the ideas, leaders, and general societal conditions that have launched and sustained, or failed to sustain, them.

And now consider that teachers have approximately one week to accomplish all of these things, if they are also to cover all the other topics in the standards.

Again, the quality of the content is excellent. But if it is really for one semester, then it might be advisable to reduce its quantity ever so slightly (e.g., by letting go of nineteenth-century South and Central American revolutions).

Finally, two misleading statements should be corrected: First, the Bill of Rights does not limit the power of state governments (12.1.6), although the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment, which has been interpreted to include some of the protections in the Bill of Rights, does place some such limit. Second, D.C. students do not have “current representatives in the legislative branch of the national government” (12.3.3), although the District does have one nonvoting delegate in the U.S. House of Representatives.

Lastly, in addition to a semester of civics, the twelfth grade also has standards for a semester of D.C. History and Government, which cover the related struggles for desegregation, suffrage, and self-government after World War II. The standards then move to current issues and the

Strengths & Weaknesses of the District of Columbia Civics Standards

Strengths

1. The Civics content of the Social Studies standards is excellent at every grade level.
2. An unusually strong U.S. History sequence provides numerous opportunities for civic learning.
3. The standards are remarkably well-organized and clearly written.

Weaknesses

1. At times, the standards for the twelfth-grade half-year courses in U.S. Government and D.C. History and Government seem unrealistic.
2. The overemphasis on history leaves little room for current issues or civic engagement in the semester on the District’s History and Government.

opportunities for students to participate in government to address them before closing with the features that make Washington, D.C., a great city. In general, the material is very good. However, with eighty-two standards for half a year, it is again too much of a good thing. And the focus on the history of the District and its government feels excessive, given the number of current issues (e.g., housing, crime, and jobs) that students are likely to find more engaging and relevant.

Skills and Dispositions

The development of civics skills can be traced in the history and social sciences analysis skills sections that follow each band of grades, and in general, the progression is solid: By fifth grade, students should understand cause and effect and cost and benefit. By eighth grade, they should understand the importance of testing the reliability of Internet information, distinguishing fact and opinion, and measuring program effectiveness. Finally, by twelfth grade, they should be able to identify bias, prejudice, and perspective and recognize strong and weak arguments.

To their credit, the D.C. standards use pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten to emphasize participation, sharing, compromise, friendship, respect, honesty, courage, modesty, rule abiding, and reliability. The second-grade standards also contain a first-rate list of past and present American heroes—people with whom students can identify—to illustrate the importance of individual action and character. Yet after second grade, civic values disappear, although the standards for grades 3–11 contain an enormous amount of potentially inspirational material. Even in twelfth grade, the standards contain nothing about education, employment, or juvenile law, subjects that would naturally interest an adolescent and help them connect the core material with the broader goal of civic engagement.

Clarity and Organization: 3/3

The District of Columbia’s civics standards are remarkably well written and well organized. The outline format is user friendly, despite the level of detail. The coding system makes it easy to find civics content. The intended scope and sequence are clear (and generally sensible). And the civic standards are free of jargon, making them accessible to general audiences.

U.S. History: A-

In Brief

The D.C. history standards are rigorous and well organized, providing teachers, parents, and other stakeholders with excellent guidance and direction.

Content and Rigor: 6/7

K–8

In general, the District of Columbia does a commendable job of covering American history.

In the early grades, the history coverage is fairly conventional, focusing on basic chronological understandings (e.g., comparing “now” and “long ago”), true stories and folktales from America, and local history. The level rigor seems appropriate for the age group.

In fourth and fifth grade, U.S. History is taught as a specific subject, with the former beginning with pre-Columbian civilizations and ending with the development of the U.S. Constitution, while the latter runs from 1789 to the present. In general, the fourth-grade course (U.S. History and Geography: Making a New Nation) does an excellent job covering most essential content (and the American Revolution in particular). However, it does not specifically mention commonly taught items such as the Columbian Exchange or the first colonial assembly, the House of Burgesses. Similarly, the fifth-grade course (U.S. History and Geography: Westward Expansion to the Present) omits some essential elements. For example, the Trail of Tears isn’t covered in the sections on westward expansion or the growth of the republic, although the standards do emphasize movements for social justice including the struggle for Cuba and Puerto Rico to separate from Spain. Finally, while the 1960s and the Civil Rights movements are well handled, the rest of the twentieth century is haphazardly covered under economic and social trends that make chronology difficult to follow.

After two years of world history and geography, a second U.S. History sequence begins in eighth grade with U.S. History and Geography I: Growth and Conflict, which starts

with a review of pre-Columbian Native American groups before moving on to colonial history. Again, there are a few oversights, including the French and Indian War and the House of Burgesses. But political history, including the fundamental principles in the U.S. Constitution, is covered in greater depth this time around. Coverage of antebellum reform movements and causes of the Civil War is also strong (though there is no mention of Lincoln’s assassination or Andrew Johnson’s impeachment).

High School

After another two years of world history, U.S. History concludes in eleventh grade with U.S. History and Geography II: Industrial America to the Present, which focuses on 1877 to the present. As one would expect, the level of rigor is higher at this grade level (for example, Grangerism and Populism are now included, and the Progressive Era and America’s growing global presence in the twentieth century are covered in a highly detailed manner.) Furthermore, the standards include frequently overlooked material, such as FDR’s Black Cabinet, the contributions of special fighting forces during WWII, and the emergence of international organizations that helped shape the modern world. And coverage of the Cold War is also impressive, with both domestic and foreign political, economic, and social implications discussed in detail (though the standards for the post-1980 era are unfortunately brief and disorganized).

Notably, the treatment of African American history is unusually thorough across all grade levels, starting with colonial enslavement, African Americans’ role in the Revolutionary War, and the Constitution’s enabling of slavery (in fourth grade) and continuing on through the expansion of the slave trade, the Missouri Compromise, the *Dred Scott* decision, the role of black soldiers in the Civil War, the abolition of slavery, the post-war amendments, the rise of the Ku Klux Klan, black codes, Jim Crow laws, the Great Migration, the creation of the NAACP, the Harlem Renaissance, and the Jazz age, as well as the desegregation of the military and the education systems (including the *Plessy*, *Brown*, and *Bolling* decisions) and the Civil Rights Movement (including the Civil Rights Act, the Voting Rights Act, the Fair Housing Act, and the Twenty-Fourth Amendment). Similarly, strong emphasis is given to the contributions of leaders such as Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman, Martin Delany, Sojourner Truth, Isaiah Dickerson, Callie House, Charles Houston, Marcus Garvey, Zora

Neale Hurston, Langston Hughes, Louis Armstrong, Jackie Robinson, Ella Jo Baker, Rosa Parks, Thurgood Marshall, Malcom X, and Martin Luther King, Jr.

Skills Development

Historical and social sciences analysis skills are introduced in the early grade bands (K–2 and 3–5) and developed in later years (6–8 and 9–12). Specific skills that students are expected to master include chronological reasoning, interpretation, causation, comparison, contextualization, making connections, and conducting historical research (among many others). Like the standards that outline the specific historical content students are meant to learn, these skills standards are generally well done.

Clarity and Organization: 3/3

Strengths & Weaknesses of the District of Columbia U.S. History Standards

Strengths

1. The District of Columbia’s U.S. History standards are rich in substantive and accurate historical content, and the eleventh-grade course is particularly rigorous.
2. The treatment of African American history is unusually thorough.
3. The well-organized and straightforward outlines should be easy for teachers and other stakeholders to understand.

Weaknesses

1. There are some odd gaps in content coverage in the elementary and middle school courses.
2. The high school course covers the post-1980 period in a manner that makes chronology difficult to understand.

The District of Columbia’s history standards are well organized, clearly presented, and easy to understand. The outline format is user friendly, despite the level of detail. The coding system makes it easy to find U.S. History-related content. The intended scope and sequence are clear (and sensible). And the history standards are essentially free of jargon, making them accessible to general audiences.

Documents Reviewed

- District of Columbia (“District”) Social Studies Pre-K through Grade 12 Standards 2006, https://osse.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/osse/publication/attachments/DCPS-horiz-soc_studies.pdf

Revisions to the District of Columbia social studies standards are currently underway.

Recommendations

Civics

1. **Reduce the volume of historical material in D.C. History and Government** and include more opportunities for students to apply their knowledge of history and government to the study of current issues in their communities (e.g., by asking them to write a paper on housing, education, or juvenile justice).
2. **Compress the second half of “comparative government”** (e.g., by deleting 12.4, 12.5, and 12.7) and add a standard on the pros and cons of alternatives to “first past the post.”
3. **Add the expectation that students learn to think critically about their own opinions** (e.g., by using their understanding of confirmation bias to critique their understanding of the facts).

U.S. History

1. **Address the specific gaps in coverage noted in the review, especially in the fourth, fifth, and eighth grade standards.**

Both Subjects

1. **Repair the minor defects in the present standards, rather than attempting wholesale revisions.**

Civics and U.S. History

Florida

A	Exemplary	10
	Standards worthy of implementation	9
B	Good	8
	Targeted revisions recommended	7
C	Mediocre	6
	Significant revisions strongly recommended	5
D	Inadequate	4
	Complete revision recommended before implementation	3
2		
0-1		

Civics: B

Content & Rigor: 5/7

Clarity & Organization: 2/3

Total Score: 7/10

U.S. History: B

Content & Rigor: 5/7

Clarity & Organization: 2/3

Total Score: 7/10

Overview

Florida’s civics and U.S. History standards are good. Both subjects can be improved by correcting minor errors and adding important detail. Targeted revisions are recommended.

Description of the Standards

Florida’s civics and U.S. History standards are organized by individual grade level (K–8) and grade band (9–12). “Civics and government” appears as a field of study or “strand” in every grade, while American History appears in every grade except sixth and seventh. Both the civics and U.S. History strands are divided into broadly worded standards, which are subdivided into more specific grade-level benchmarks that contain most of the content expectations.¹ Additional “clarifications” associated with the teacher-facing versions of some standards are also included in the review when and where they appear. Florida also offers “Access Points for Students with Significant Cognitive Disabilities,” which provide broad additional guidance linked to the benchmarks. However, because these general guidelines largely reiterate content that already appears in benchmarks, they are not included in this review. Also excluded is a further category of state-supplied material called Related Resources, which includes suggested lesson plans and student projects.

Civics: B

In Brief

Florida's civics standards provide basic coverage of most major topics. But greater specificity is needed, especially in high school, and the organization of the benchmarks leaves something to be desired.

Content and Rigor: 5/7

K-8

The standards for Kindergarten introduce the concept of “rule” and the subset of rules we know as “laws.” Students are made aware of the importance of rules at home, at school, and in the community. Grade 1 continues with a list of holidays and “symbols of American constitutional democracy,” plus a benchmark for “people from the past who have shown...principles such as honesty, courage, and responsibility.” Students are expected to give examples of people who have the power and authority to make and enforce rules (suggestions include a school principal, cafeteria manager, and teacher) and, interestingly, people who wield “power without authority” in the school and community.

The standards correctly recognize that grade 2, which focuses on immigration, is an appropriate year to discuss citizenship, including of traditionally underrecognized groups (benchmarks SS.2.C.2, 4, 5). However, they somewhat confusingly switch between citizenship as legal status and citizenship as community behavior (e.g., respect, responsibility, participation).

Grade 3 uses American and North American geography to introduce students to the idea of local, state, and national government, have them learn how local government is organized, and understand that every state has a constitution but the U.S. Constitution is supreme. Collectively, the civics standards and benchmarks for this grade comprise a nice package of age-appropriate information. However, some important civics lessons involving race are lost in grade 4, which is organized around the history of Florida, due to the decision to skip from

Florida's “involvement” in the Civil War and Reconstruction to its economy in the 1920's and Great Depression. Although students are rightly expected to explain how Florida's present constitution protects the rights of citizens (SS.4.C.1.1), there is even more civics to be learned by contrasting it with Florida's two prior constitutions (such as the 1885 constitution, which enshrined the poll tax, racial segregation, and antimiscegenation). In addition to providing students with an introduction to race, gender, and representation in Florida, grade 4 would also be a good time for teachers to explain that Florida's constitution contains both political and civil rights, as well as both positive and negative rights. But unfortunately, a benchmark that refers to “rights” in the state's current constitution (SS.4.C.1.1) has little content or rigor.

In grade 5, which focuses on U.S. History until 1850, students are expected to know and compare forms of political participation in the Colonial period and today with attention to constitutional amendments (SS.5.C.2.2,3); explain “the origin of rights” (a challenging task) and identify the grievances in the Declaration of Independence (SS.5.C.1.3,4); differentiate the ideas of Patriots, Loyalists, and “undecideds” during the American Revolution; identify the weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation (SS.5.C.1.3, 4); define and discuss the purposes of a constitution (SS.5.C.1.2); and know the Federalist and Anti-Federalist views of government (SS.5.C.1.6). They are also expected to describe the organization of the federal government today; demonstrate how the Constitution illustrates the concepts of popular sovereignty, rule of law, separation of powers, checks and balances, federalism, and individual rights (SS.5.C.3.1-2); know the different scope of powers of the federal and state governments; explain and give examples of the amendment process; describe the fundamental rights of all “citizens” under the Bill of Rights; and understand the role of courts in interpreting law and settling conflicts. One can hardly ask for a better set of challenging but age-appropriate expectations for fifth-grade students.

Although grade 6 is dedicated to World Geography and World History until approximately 1400 AD, the civics benchmarks rightly flag the “democratic concepts developed in ancient Greece” and the contribution of the Roman Republic's “principles [of] separation of powers, rule of law, representative government, and civic duty” and laudably expect the student to tie these classical features to

“American political process today” and discuss their effect on that process (SS.6.C.1.1-2, SS.6.C.2.1). In general, the benchmarks identify the key features of classical history that bear on American government today. The only omission is their failure to connect the Judeo-Christian emphasis on “individual worth and responsibility” (SS.6.W.2.In.i) with Reformation and Enlightenment political theory.

Based on the text of the standards, grade 7 Civics appears to be a *specific* history of political theory and practice from Magna Carta in 1215 through the Enlightenment and Founding to the present day, whereas Civics in grade 8 is mostly found within a *general* history of the United States from the end of the French and Indian War in 1763 to the end of Reconstruction in the late 1800s. The overlap of material is obvious, and many topics are in fact covered twice—to the point where some reconsideration of how the material is divided between years may be appropriate.²

The civics material that is unique to grade 7 is also uneven. For example, it includes the advances in English practice marked by Magna Carta and the English Bill of Rights, the influence of Locke and Montesquieu on the American Founders, and some well-chosen decisions that show the power of courts when interpreting the U.S. Constitution on matters directly relevant to students, such as *Brown v Board of Education*, *Tinker v. Des Moines*, and *Hazelwood v. Kuhlmeier* (SS.7.C.3.12). There is also a decent standard that asks students to compare federal, confederal, and unitary systems (though it would be clearer to have a separate standard for parliamentary systems). However, one benchmark that asks students to compare the constitutions of the United States and Florida provides regrettably little guidance.³ Similarly, two standards that ask students to “evaluate” rights in the Bill of Rights and Constitution are too broad (and potentially repetitive, depending on how educators interpret the word “Constitution”), as are the two benchmarks that address the “structure” and “function” of the three branches of government. Finally, the civics material that is unique to grade 8 varies in quality. The attention given to Native American rights and the Marshall Trilogy of cases is excellent. However, the events leading up to the Civil War—the Missouri Compromise, Compromise of 1850, and Kansas Nebraska Act—should be tied to the U.S. Constitution, including Congress’s power to make rules for federal territory and create new states in Article IV Section 3 and the duty of states to return fugitive slaves in Article IV Section 2. Similarly, the Supreme Court’s decision in *Scott v. Sanford*

should be listed among the causes of the Civil War. The civics benchmarks that ask students to “apply the rights and principles contained in the Constitution and Bill of Rights to the lives of citizens today” and “evaluate how amendments to the Constitution have expanded voting rights from our nation’s early history to present day” (SS.8.C.1.5-6) are a brave gesture toward a monumental task.

High School

Florida’s benchmarks for the high school Civics course are average. On the plus side, they ask students to step out of the shadows, think for themselves, say what they think, and support their viewpoint with reasoning—on topics that

Strengths & Weaknesses of the Florida Civics Standards

Strengths

1. The civics standards include a great deal of essential content.
2. Between the seventh-grade content and the high school civics course, Florida devotes an unusual amount of bandwidth to civics as such.
3. Connections to current events are consistently emphasized and well handled.
4. The standards exhibit a strong commitment to community service.

Weaknesses

1. Coverage of topics such as electoral process, comparative politics, and the Bill of Rights is too general, especially in high school.
2. There is no explicit reference to due process or equal protection anywhere in the standards.
3. The language of the standards suggests that “rule of law” is popular obedience to law.

matter. For example, students are expected to “take and defend” positions on issues that cause the government to balance the interests of individuals with the public good (SS.912.C.2.4), analyze public policy solutions to resolve a local, state, or federal issue (SS.912.C.2.11), and explain the changing roles of television, the press, radio, the press, and social media (SS.912.C.2.12). Furthermore, they are expected to illustrate how government affects the daily lives of citizens at the local, state, and national levels (SS.912.C.3.13), evaluate the outcome and significance of landmark Supreme Court cases such as *Plessy v. Ferguson* and *Roe v. Wade* (SS.912.C.3.10), compare the role of state and federal judges with those of other elected officials (SS.912.C.3.8), and identify the impact of independent regulatory agencies (SS.912.C.3.5).

Still, there are some weak points. For example, despite several standards that touch on the elections and parties, there is almost no specific coverage of the nuts and bolts of the electoral process including the electoral college, redistricting, primaries, campaign finance, or voter access policies. And the coverage of comparative politics consists mostly of a standard that asks students to explain “how the world’s nations are governed differently.” Finally, coverage of the Bill of Rights remains extremely general.

Incredibly, the term “due process” does not appear anywhere in the Florida standards. Nor does the term “equal protection” (though one 7th grade standard does reference the Reconstruction amendments). And some other bedrock principles never quite get their due. For example, the treatment of the concept of “rule of law” is unsatisfactory in both middle school and high school. In seventh grade, the term is explained by saying that “people must follow the laws of the government” (SS.7.C.1.In.i), and the high school explanation likewise identifies rule of law with “respecting the law” (SS.912.C.1.Su.e). Both definitions focus on the obedience of the governed, thus missing the more important features of rule of law, which address the conduct of those who govern.⁴

Skills and Dispositions

Civic skills are implicit in many of Florida’s standards. In grade 1, students are introduced to the difference between primary and secondary sources and fact and fiction (SS.1.A.1.1, 2.5). By grade 4, they are to understand that choices involve trade-offs (SS.4.FL.2.2), a theme that

continues with the later choice between public and private interests (SS.912.C.2.4). Although the phrase “critical thinking skills” isn’t used, these skills are built into the expectations of high school students, which include the expectation that students “analyze various forms of political communication and evaluate [them] for bias, factual accuracy, omission, and emotional appeal” (SS.912.C.2.13). The expectation that students explain “confirmation bias” and use their understanding of it to critique their own understanding of the facts would be a nice addition to this standard.

Florida gets off to a good start on civic dispositions, slows down somewhat between grades 3 and 6, and returns strong beginning in seventh grade. Students in the early grades are expected to be able to describe the characteristics of being a “good citizen” and “responsible citizenship” (SS.K.C.2.1-3, SS.1.C.2.2, SS.2.C.2.2). Starting in third grade, citizenship becomes more academic. For example, students are expected to identify group and individual actions that demonstrate civic virtues (3.C.2.1), explain the importance of public service and volunteering (4.C.2.3), evaluate the importance of civic responsibilities (5.C.2.4), and identify classical principles such as civic participation that are reflected in the American political process today (6.C.2.1).

Commendably, grade 7 contains the simple, straightforward expectation that each student “conduct a service project to further the public good” (7.C.2.14), and the high school Civics course contains the same expectation (SS.912.C.2.5).

Clarity and Organization: 2/3

In general, Florida’s civics standards are well written and sensibly organized. Although the numbering of the eighth-grade civics standards doesn’t align with the numbering of the standards in other grades, the benchmarks remain easy to follow. Still, the order in which individual benchmarks appear is sometimes mysterious. (For example, the first four benchmarks for grade 7 move from forms of government to types of law, then to different types of courts followed by “landmark Supreme Court cases.”) Furthermore, some standards are highly repetitive, both within grades and across them. Finally, the wording of some individual standards is vague or strange. For example, students are mysteriously exhorted to “experience the responsibilities of citizens at the local, state, or federal levels” not once

but twice (SS.7.C.2.3, SS.912.C.2.3). But repeating this exhortation doesn't make it any clearer or more useful for practicing educators.

U.S. History: B

In Brief

In general, Florida's U.S. History standards do a solid job pointing to essential historical content. However, there are some unfortunate gaps, and explanatory depth is often lacking.

Content and Rigor: 5/7

K-8

The history standards for early grades focus on analytical concepts such as chronology, sources, and change over time, while also invoking holidays and national symbols. Grade 2 begins to add specifics, emphasizing Native Americans and immigration. However, grade 3 does not offer U.S. History content, while grade 4 focuses on Florida history, offering a basic outline from Native American peoples to the present.

Florida's main U.S. History sequence thus begins in grade 5, which covers everything from precontact cultures to the early nineteenth century. To its credit, the grade 5 course at least touches on most of the major themes of this era—early Native American societies, European exploration and imperial settlement, colonial regions and society, the American Revolution, the Constitution, and the United States' subsequent expansion. But specificity is erratic. The rather thin coverage of the Colonial era notes the introduction and entrenchment of slavery but not the rise of self-government. An item on land policies under the Articles of Confederation is specific, but “identify and explain significant events leading up the American Revolution” is decidedly not. Relevant content—including European/Native American trade, weaknesses of the Articles, and Federalists vs. Anti-Federalists—appears separately in the economics and civics strands (these strands are more tightly defined in grade 8 and high school, avoiding similar overlap with the history strand).

After two years of World History and Civics, U.S. History returns in grade 8, starting again with European settlement and British Colonial regions and continuing through Reconstruction. The political development of the colonies is now mentioned, but the rise of self-government is still not specifically discussed. The French and Indian War and its impact (omitted in grade 5) is noted but not explained. Coverage of the American Revolution and early Republic is more specific, but the level of detail remains uneven, and explanation continues to be lacking. Still, the outline does mention the Colonial-British schism, the weaknesses of the Articles, key debates at the Constitutional Convention, and the Washington, Adams, and Jefferson presidencies.

Detail remains patchy in the nineteenth century, where thematic organization somewhat undercuts chronology (for example, the War of 1812, Trail of Tears, Mexican War, and Compromise of 1850 are lumped together in a single benchmark on “westward expansion”). Still, fundamental points such as the expansion of slavery, Jacksonian democracy, Supreme Court rulings, technological change and transportation, the Second Great Awakening, and reform movements are noted.

Unfortunately, the sectional crisis is given short shrift, with most specifics relegated to the prior benchmark on westward expansion. And coverage of the Civil War is broad (for example, students are expected to “explain major domestic and international economic, military, political, and sociocultural events of Abraham Lincoln's presidency”). Reconstruction receives a single benchmark but with a reasonably solid list of examples, including presidential vs. congressional Reconstruction, Johnson's impeachment, and the Reconstruction Amendments, as well as Jim Crow laws and the Klan (the Black Codes are missing but are noted in the high school course's brief recap of Reconstruction).

High School

The high school American history strand (which is clearly intended to define a high-school-level course) continues the grade 8 survey from post-Civil War to the present. Late-nineteenth-century industrialization is discussed in reasonable detail, along with immigration, urbanization, and social and labor movements. Coverage of U.S. imperialism and WWI is uneven but does note the essentials. And discussion of the 1920s is solid, including Civil Rights efforts, the Harlem Renaissance, labor unrest, and the Klan.

However, the Depression and the New Deal are relegated to a single benchmark that simply suggests students examine their “causes, course, and consequences.”

A single standard with fifteen benchmarks covers WWII and the U.S. in the postwar world. But this section is rushed, with decidedly erratic depth and detail. Prewar U.S. neutrality policy is noted, though the war itself and the home front get little space until the atomic bomb and the formation of the U.N. A smattering of Cold War events and the 1950s Red Scare are mentioned, but the conflict with Soviet Communism isn’t explained. Korea and Vietnam are mentioned in passing, and a single benchmark suggests that students analyze “significant foreign policy events” from Truman to Nixon.

A final standard that combines post-WWII domestic developments and the nation’s recent global role feels particularly rushed. Post-WWII U.S. prosperity is noted, but specifics such as the Baby Boom and suburbanization

are not. Broad benchmarks invoke the Women’s Rights movement and the Civil Rights movement, and Supreme Court decisions on integration, busing, affirmative action, reproductive rights, and the rights of the accused are noted but not named (*Brown v. Board of Education* and *Plessy v. Ferguson* appear in the grade 7 civics strand but not in any U.S. History course). The Great Society and Watergate are mentioned but not contextualized. Issues such as terrorism, immigration, economic globalization, and “social concerns” are listed. But the standards never mention the New Right or the end of the Cold War. Indeed, essentially nothing specific is named after Watergate.

Skills Development

Each American History strand opens with a skills standard, which is typically unobjectionable. The concept of primary sources is introduced in Kindergarten, along with basic concepts of chronology, and primary and secondary sources are distinguished by grade 2. However, skills content remains limited until grade 8, which introduces use and assessment of sources, supporting details, strength of arguments, and distinguishing fact from opinion. High school introduces the concept of historiography and further expands on use, assessment, and categories of sources. Unfortunately, there is little emphasis on presentation of research or conclusions and no specific reference to producing written work.

Strengths & Weaknesses of the Florida U.S. History Standards

Strengths

1. Florida’s content outlines identify most key issues in U.S. History.
2. Skills coverage is sophisticated in later grades, despite a failure to address written presentation.
3. In general, the standards are well written and sensibly organized.

Weaknesses

1. U.S. History content outlines are often uneven, suffer from avoidable gaps, and lack explanatory detail.
2. Grade 5’s introductory course ends before the Civil War, leaving the primary grades with no coverage of more modern eras.

Clarity and Organization: 2/3

As discussed in the Civics review, the Florida social studies standards are generally straightforward and usable. Except in grade 5 (where there is some overlap with the economics and civics strands), U.S. History content is presented in a unified manner within the American history strand, although it would be helpful if Florida explained exactly how the various high school strands relate to the courses that students take.

Although the standards document offers no summaries or course titles for individual grades, the U.S. History sequence is clear from the outlines themselves, which make the scope of each grade’s chronological coverage plain. Unfortunately, that sequence is itself flawed, as it means there is no coverage of the Civil War or the events of the twentieth century until eighth grade and later and that some important events from the founding era are *only* covered in fifth grade.

Recommendations

Civics

- 1. Strengthen the coverage of electoral process** (e.g., by adding standards that specifically reference the electoral college, redistricting, primary elections, campaign finance, and voter access policies).
- 2. Bolster the standards on the forms of other governments** (e.g., by asking students to consider the pros and cons of federal, confederal, and unitary systems, parliamentary and presidential systems, and alternatives to “first past the post” elections).
- 3. Consider adding the expectation that high school students be able to explain “confirmation bias”** and use their knowledge of it to critique their understanding of the facts.

U.S. History

- 1. Strengthen the U.S. History outlines** by plugging the specific gaps noted in the review and providing more historical explanation.
- 2. Offer a full introductory survey of U.S. History in elementary school** in addition to the grade 8–high school survey.

Documents Reviewed

- “Next Generation Sunshine State Standards – Social Studies,” 2014, <http://www.fl DOE.org/core/fileparse.php/5444/urlt/0074986-financial.pdf>

ENDNOTES

1. In the PDF of Florida’s standards, benchmarks have been automatically sorted out of correct order—e.g. with 5.10 following 5.1 and preceding 5.2. This often creates an incorrect impression that U.S. History benchmarks have been organized out of chronological sequence and should be corrected.
2. The topics that are taught twice in two years (and, for some subjects, three times in four years, counting fifth grade) include the British Colonial policies (SS.7.C.1.3, SS.8.A.3.1-2), the Declaration of Independence (SS.7.C.1.3-4, SS.8.A.3.7), the Articles of Confederation (SS.7.C.1.5, SS.8.A.3.9), the Constitution (SS.7.C.1.6-7, SS.8.A.3.10), the debates between Federalists and Anti-Federalists (SS.7.C.1.8, SS.8.3.11), the Bill of Rights (SS.7.C.1.8, SS.7.C.2.4, p 24; SS.8.A.3.11), the Reconstruction Amendments (SS.7.C.3.7; SS.8.A.5.8, SS.8.C.1.6), and the racial segregation laws (SS.7.C.3.12, SS.8.A.5.8).
3. Rather than let teachers across the state fend for themselves, the standard in question could list such notable differences as Florida’s express rights of education, work, privacy, life, liberty and pursuit of happiness; adoption of the federal Fourth Amendment search and seizure law; crime victims’, taxpayers’, and medical malpractice plaintiffs’ recovery rights; parental notification for minor abortions; and official state language, plural executive, general jurisdiction, and initiative provisions.
4. “Rule of law” is a cluster of ideas about government. One big idea is that laws should be clear, public, and prospective in application if they carry a penalty (features of due process). Another idea is that laws should be written and enforced equally against everyone except with good reason (features of equal protection). And a third idea, present in some definitions of rule of law, requires that the “law” that “rules” protect fundamental rights such as privacy, speech, assembly, and religious exercise.

Georgia

A	Exemplary	10
	Standards worthy of implementation	9
B	Good	8
	Targeted revisions recommended	7
C	Mediocre	6
	Significant revisions strongly recommended	5
D	Inadequate	4
	Complete revision recommended before implementation	3
2		
0-1		
F		

Civics: B+

Content & Rigor: 5/7

Clarity & Organization: 3/3

Total Score: 8/10

U.S. History: B+

Content & Rigor: 5/7

Clarity & Organization: 3/3

Total Score: 8/10

Overview

Georgia’s civics and U.S. History standards are quite good. The content is rich, well organized, and easily applied, despite a few omissions and pacing issues. Targeted revisions are recommended.

Description of the Standards

Georgia’s “Standards of Excellence” for social studies are organized by grade level for K–8, with each grade divided into strands (“understandings”) for history, geography, government/civics, and economics—and into subject-specific courses for high school. Each strand or course consists of content headings laying out broad concepts that students should be able to “explain,” “analyze,” “identify,” etc. Each content heading is followed by subheads with more specifics.

Charts following each grade/course lay out map/globe and information processing skills (to be introduced, developed, mastered, or applied at progressive grade levels) and, for middle and high school grades, reading and writing standards “for literacy in history/social studies” (skills for reading, analyzing, and citing primary and secondary sources, including comprehension of cause and effect, different interpretations of the same events, etc.).

Civics: B+

In Brief

Georgia’s K–12 civics standards are strong—well organized, clearly written, and full of appropriately rigorous content. However, these strengths are sometimes undermined by pacing issues at the K–8 level, and there is no mention of “equal protection” at any level.

Content and Rigor: 5/7

K–8

Georgia’s K–8 civics standards include a great deal of essential content, which is sometimes undermined by pacing issues.

The K–2 standards focus on the importance of rules and laws, the concept of patriotism, and values such as honesty and respect. New values are emphasized each year using a diverse selection of historical figures as exemplars, and students in second grade also learn about executive branch officials at the local, state, and national levels. Although this last topic doesn’t really fit with the broader theme of rules and laws, in general the K–2 civics material provides a solid foundation for the more sophisticated topics to come.

In third grade, students learn about the three branches of government at both the state and national levels, as well as core democratic beliefs, with an emphasis on developing a civic disposition. However, there is a mismatch between the Colonial history and post-Colonial civics content in this grade, and the standards aim too low (even considering the grade level) when they indicate that it is the function of the judicial branch to “determine if laws are fair” rather than to interpret and apply them. Finally, third grade is the last time before high school that essential civic dispositions, such as an inclination to “participate in public life,” are explicitly discussed.

Much of the success of Georgia’s current K–8 civics sequence hinges on fourth grade, which is overstuffed with a broad range of big topics, including natural rights, representative democracy, checks and balances, federalism,

and the Bill of Rights, with special emphasis on the First Amendment. Unfortunately, it’s simply too much for one grade, and this crucial content could and should be spread more evenly across the middle school grades. Similarly, but less egregiously, fifth grade covers citizens’ rights, the amendment process, due process, and the voting rights amendments in perhaps inadvisable breadth. Given the limitations of classroom time, a thorough discussion of the Fifteenth and Nineteenth Amendments might be more appropriate than covering all the voting amendments—ideally as part of a broader discussion of equal protection, which is a timely but notably absent topic.

The sixth and seventh grade Social Studies standards amount to a two-year world tour, the civics component of which covers the governments of no fewer than 18 countries but is superficial, focusing only on whether a government is autocratic or democratic and parliamentary or presidential. This is a wasted opportunity to introduce such key concepts as single-party versus multi-party systems, unicameral versus bicameral legislatures, “first-past-the-post” voting systems versus systems that ensure proportional representation or majority election, and unitary versus federal or confederate systems. Furthermore, the statement that Russia is a “presidential democracy” is misleading unless accompanied by a clear explanation that Russia’s institutions and society are not democratic in practice (which could lead to discussion about the difference between nominally and genuinely constitutional governments).

Eighth grade shifts the focus from international to local institutions with a comprehensive and age-appropriate survey of the branches of Georgia’s state government and the roles of city and county governments. The inclusion of the juvenile justice system should be of particular interest to students. However, like the standards for other middle grades, the eighth grade standards say little about the dispositions that students should be encouraged to develop as citizens.

High School

Overall, the outline of the high school course on American Government and Civics is excellent. The seventeen topics are well chosen and phrased, and if a student knew everything in the outline, he or she would be well prepared to understand the news and navigate government.

Still, a few weaknesses emerge. For example:

SSCG2, which discusses the political philosophies that shaped the development of American constitutional government, fails to mention the classical republicanism of Pericles, Aristotle, Cato, and Cicero (i.e., the philosophy of the common good, which is an essential counterweight to the natural rights of Locke).

SSCG7 asks teachers to make a specific distinction between “civil rights” and “civil liberties,” and this would be the logical place to mention the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment.

SSCG15 includes useful specifics on electoral process but makes no mention of redistricting, gerrymandering, or voter access.

Finally, although the standards provide strong coverage of the U.S. government, there is nothing that could be described as comparative government.

Broadly, the high school standards do little to promote the use of current events, which are a necessary element of a civics course that aims to prepare students for informed and engaged citizenship. Nor do they appear to invite disagreement and argument. Despite occasional references to differences in opinion, such as the pros and cons of lobbyists and Supreme Court decisions on campaign finance, other issues that could catalyze fruitful debate, such as the Electoral College, gerrymandering, and the growth of executive power, are included without an invitation to engage.

Skills and Dispositions

Running through each strand of the Georgia Social Studies standards are expectations for students’ skills in processing information—for example, distinguishing fact from opinion, identifying a problem or issue and its alternative solutions, and determining the relevance and adequacy of information to support a conclusion. In addition to being highly relevant to informed citizenship, these skill sets are clearly laid out and well sequenced, with progressively more advanced skills marked for introduction, development, mastery, and application in successive grade levels. However, they would be even stronger with the addition of an explicit expectation that students be able to think critically about their own opinions (see Recommendations).

At the middle and high school levels, these “information processing skills” are bolstered by the addition of an even more impressive set of reading and writing standards for literacy in history/social studies that expect students to evaluate the sources of information, judge the strength of the evidence supporting a conclusion, recognize point of view, distinguish cause and correlation, and compose a reasoned argument on a matter of social importance. Like the information processing skills, the expectations embodied in these standards are highly relevant to informed citizenship.

When it comes to cultivating essential civic dispositions (as opposed to skills), there is less to praise—though to be fair, one high school standard (SSCG16) does note that persons can “responsibly” participate in public life by voting, volunteering, and serving the public. Insofar as it is meant to endorse such participation, this standard is on target. Still, the standards could more consistently and explicitly promote public service in other grade levels, as well as other essential

Strengths & Weaknesses of the Georgia Civics Standards

Strengths

1. The standards include a great deal of essential content.
2. The high school course on U.S. government is particularly impressive.
3. In general, the standards are well-organized and clearly written.
4. A strong U.S. History sequence provides numerous opportunities for civic learning.

Weaknesses

1. There are some pacing issues at the K–8 level.
2. There is nothing that could be described as comparative government at the high school level.

dispositions, such as respect for other persons and opinions and a commitment to the preservation of constitutional democracy.

Clarity and Organization: 3/3

Georgia’s Social Studies standards, including its standards for civics, are admirably clear, well organized, and user friendly. Although there is no indication of when the various high school courses are to be offered (and whether they are required or elective), the table of contents makes individual grades and courses easy to find. And the content for each grade or course is laid out in clear text, rather than forcing the several social studies strands into visually confusing charts or tables.

Georgia’s civics standards are also written in excellent English, using relatively short sentences, few superfluous words, and no typographical errors. In general, the transparency of the text makes it easy to understand what is expected of the teacher (and, inevitably, to spot oversights).

U.S. History: B+

In Brief

Georgia’s history standards are clear, well organized, and user friendly. Skills that are essential to the analysis and explication of historical content are well developed, and the high school course is impressive. However, the elementary content outline is uneven.

Content and Rigor: 5/7

K-8

Historical content from Kindergarten through second grade is conventional for the age level, focusing on holidays, patriotic symbols, a few famous individuals (national and local), changes in everyday life over time, and Georgia’s native peoples. The inclusion of chronological concepts in Kindergarten is welcome.

The elementary U.S. History course begins in third grade. The outline touches on Native American cultural regions, prominent European explorers and Indian contact, British colonial regions and their differing aims (“religious freedom and profit”). Although “the perspectives of various people” is invoked, there is no direct reference to two central developments in the British colonies: the emergence of representative government and the entrenchment of slavery. Of course, coverage must be broad in third grade, but such fundamental concepts belong even in a basic introductory overview.

Fourth grade seeks to cover more ground, but coverage is patchy, with some topics receiving considerable detail while equally important or more fundamental material is left out. There are fairly detailed discussions of the Revolution and the Constitutional Convention, but the crucial period from 1789 to 1800 is omitted completely. The Washington presidency is therefore missing, and the Bill of Rights appears only in the civics strand. The War of 1812, Westward Expansion, and its impact on Native Americans are covered, but the crucial Jacksonian-era expansion of democracy is absent. The Civil War, Reconstruction, and the rise of Jim Crow receive reasonably strong coverage, but the framing of “states’ rights and slavery” as the root of the sectional schism is problematic: States’ rights claims were principally made in defense of slavery and should not be given primacy.

Fifth grade coverage of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries is similarly spotty. Immigration is mentioned, but industrialization is not. Oddly, post-Civil War Westward Expansion is reduced to “the role of the cattle trails.” Coverage of the Spanish-American War through World War II is stronger (the decision to drop the atomic bombs is referenced with notably neutral wording); the Cold War and the Civil Rights Revolution are covered well. But the brief final section covering 1975–2001 comes across as an afterthought, and there is nothing on more recent events.

U.S. History does not return until high school, though Georgia history is examined in reasonable depth in eighth grade, from the impact of European settlement on native peoples through the Colonial period, the Revolution, nineteenth century expansion, the Civil War and Reconstruction, the New South era, and Jim Crow, and on to the early twenty-first century. Coverage of the

sectional schism is notably stronger here than in fifth grade, placing slavery before states' rights and noting specific events, including the Nullification Crisis, the Compromise of 1850, and the Dred Scott decision. The suppression of Reconstruction-era Black officeholding is an unusual and noteworthy inclusion.

High School

The high school U.S. History course (which is not assigned to any specific grade or number of semesters) revisits most of the time span covered in third through fifth grades, excluding Native American cultures before European contact. The outline's specificity is often impressive. The rise of colonial self-government and of slavery—not directly mentioned in the elementary grades—are now not only mentioned but emphasized. Discussions of the Revolution and the Constitution are admirably sophisticated, and the Washington and Adams presidencies and the election of 1800 appear (though the emergence of political parties still goes unmentioned). Jacksonian democracy, the growing schism over slavery, and many specific antebellum events are included.

There are still gaps: For example, despite notably specific references to Presidential versus Congressional Reconstruction and the Black Codes, secession itself somehow goes unmentioned. But the late nineteenth century—including key issues of economic development, immigration, monopolies, organized labor, railroads and western expansion, the impact on the Plains Indians, and growing U.S. influence overseas—now receives considerable attention. Populism is skipped, even as progressivism is covered, but the content is generally strong.

Sections on World War I and its aftermath touch on points frequently omitted from standards, such as the Espionage Act, the Red Scare, and immigration restriction. Many aspects of the New Deal, American involvement in World War II, and post-war eras are covered, including the World War II home front and the Japanese internment. Yet the global backdrop to World War II—German fascism, Japanese militaristic nationalism, and even the Holocaust—is strangely absent, though it does appear in the elementary standards.

Due to the way the content is organized, the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s gets a bit lost. For example, *Brown v. Board of Education* is grouped with the GI Bill, Truman's integration moves, McCarthyism, and the national highway system. Similarly, although LBJ's civil rights legislation is noted, "civil rights" is listed among the topics influenced by the rise of televised news, and Martin Luther King, Jr. is briefly discussed together with Cesar Chavez; there is little sense of the development of the Civil Rights Revolution. Voting rights are not specifically mentioned, the Montgomery bus boycott does not reappear, and African American activism is not explicitly linked to the overthrow of Jim Crow.

Strengths & Weaknesses of the Georgia U.S. History Standards

Strengths

1. Georgia's U.S. History standards documents are admirably clear, well organized, and user friendly.
2. The Peach State offers two passes through U.S. History: the first in grades 3-5, the second a one-year high school course.
3. The high school course outline is generally impressive, detailed, and substantively rigorous.
4. Analytic skill sets are clearly presented and highly relevant to studying and writing about history.

Weaknesses

1. The three-year elementary grade sequence omits significant number of core historical developments that students should have some exposure to before high school.
2. The high school course occasionally fails to mention or appropriately emphasize important content, including recent historical events.

Coverage from the 1970s to the 2008 election, the last event mentioned, is rushed, with the end of the Cold War lumped together with Clinton’s impeachment and the 9/11 attacks. “Reaganomics” is mentioned in passing, but Reagan and the New Right receive no direct attention.

Skills Development

As noted in the Civics review, “information processing skills,” ranging from basic comparisons and chronological concepts to broadly defined invocations of research and interpretation, are set out in charts that accompany each grade level, with progressively more advanced skills marked for introduction, development, mastery, and application in successive grade levels. At the middle and high school levels, reading and writing standards “for literacy in history/social studies” are added, explicating skills such as identifying authorial bias, distinguishing between fact and opinion, analyzing the relationship between primary and secondary sources, and constructing and presenting arguments. In general, these skill sets (and the literacy standards in particular) are impressively sophisticated, demanding significant analytical and presentation skills by the high school level, including many that are essential to analyzing and explicating historical content.

Clarity and Organization: 3/3

The Civics review describes it well: Georgia’s Social Studies standards are admirably clear, well organized, and user friendly. Although there is no indication of how or when the various high school courses are to be offered (or which ones are required), the table of contents makes individual grades and courses easy to find. The content for each grade or course is laid out in clear text rather than forcing the several social studies strands into visually confusing charts or tables.

Appropriately, the history strand is presented first in each K–8 grade and often given the most space, creating essential context for the other strands, which pursue related (as well as independent) topics without splitting history content between multiple strands. The history standards are also essentially free of jargon, making them accessible to general audiences.

Recommendations

Civics

1. **Reduce the amount of content in fourth grade and beef up the sixth and seventh grade content.**
2. **Add standards on voter access and comparative government to the high school civics course.**
3. **Add the expectation that students learn to think critically about their own opinions** (e.g., by using their understanding of confirmation bias to critique their understanding of the facts).

U.S. History

1. **Bolster K–5 content coverage by including fundamental points that are currently left out.**
2. **Improve the generally strong high school standards by addressing specific oversights.**

Both subjects

1. **Preserve the considerable merits of the current standards in any future revisions.**
2. **Consider adding—either in a new introduction or as parallel expectations for each grade band—a description of the purpose of civics and U.S. History education.** This should include the acquisition of dispositions that are essential to effective citizenship, such as respect for other persons, an inclination to participate and serve the public, and a commitment to the preservation of constitutional democracy and the realization of core American ideals, such as freedom, justice, and equality.

Documents Reviewed

- “Social Studies: Georgia Standards of Excellence (GSE), Kindergarten – Grade 12,” 2016, <https://www.georgiastandards.org/Georgia-Standards/Documents/Social-Studies-K-12-Georgia-Standards.pdf>

Civics and U.S. History

Hawaii

A	Exemplary	10
	Standards worthy of implementation	9
B	Good	8
	Targeted revisions recommended	7
C	Mediocre	6
	Significant revisions strongly recommended	5
D	Inadequate	4
	Complete revision recommended before implementation	3
F		2
		0-1

Civics: C+

Content & Rigor: 4/7

Clarity & Organization: 2/3

Total Score: 6/10

U.S. History: C

Content & Rigor: 4/7

Clarity & Organization: 1/3

Total Score: 5/10

Overview

Hawaii’s civics and U.S. History standards are mediocre, with patchy coverage and an overly complex organizational scheme that fractures essential content. Significant revisions are strongly recommended.

Description of the Standards

Hawaii offers social studies content outlines for individual grades K–8 and for six high school courses, including required courses in “U.S. History and Government” and “Participation in a Democracy.” As the introduction explains, content is divided into four strands—civics, economics, history, and geography—which are subdivided into nineteen anchor standards, each with subsidiary content standards that articulate the expectations for specific grades and courses. However, within the charts that comprise the bulk of the outlines, grade- or course-specific content standards are organized into conceptual or chronological themes, which are furnished with “sample compelling questions” and subdivided into topics. In every chart, the first column notes the anchor standard and (color-coded) strand, followed by the topic, the content standard, and—lastly—“sample content and concepts” that further define each content standard. Finally, in addition to the nineteen content anchor standards, there are five skills-focused “inquiry” anchor standards, each with multiple grade-band-specific standards for the K–2, 3–5, 6–8, and 9–12 bands that appear at the start of the relevant grade or course outlines.

Civics: C+

In Brief

Hawaii’s civics standards have numerous weaknesses, from an unambitious elementary K–8 sequence to a high school sequence that is missing some essential content. From a civics perspective, the course on U.S. History and Government has considerable potential; however, like the rest of the standards it is hamstrung by needlessly complex organization and presentation.

Content and Rigor: 4/7

K–8

Although Hawaii’s K–3 social standards are broad, they do include a reasonably clear and logical civics progression. Kindergarten covers rules and responsibilities, while grade 1 introduces big-picture ideas such as the common good, liberty, popular sovereignty, and how people can improve their communities. Grade 2 focuses on national leaders past and present (e.g., Abraham Lincoln, the principal, the mayor, and members of Congress) and the goods and services provided by the government. Finally, grade 3 explores how people can change the law or society (e.g., voting, petitioning, and protesting) and be active citizens, although the “sample content” for the penultimate third-grade standard also includes the five freedoms in the First Amendment (which isn’t named). In general, the expectations for these grades are unambitious, and nebulous standards are often followed by wide-ranging and somewhat unfocused sample content. For example, third graders are to “explain purposes of various government functions” (SS.3.2.6.5), with sample content that includes “consumer protection, education, environmental protections, health care, national passing and enforcing of laws, recreation, safety, sanitation and security,” only some of which seems age appropriate.

Interestingly, the standards for grade 4 address civic virtues through the lens of Hawaiian culture (which is the grade-level focus). For example, one “sample content” item lists cooperation (kōkua), family (‘ohana), harmony (lōkahi), importance of responsibility (kuleana), righteousness

(pono), spirituality (pili’uhane/ho’omana), and stewardship (mālama) as examples of “core values” (SS.4.4.7.2). Although the reviewer sees no reason to second guess that judgment, the focus on Hawaii does mean that the three branches of government must wait. In fact, because grade 5 covers U.S. History from precontact Native America through the Revolution (but not the Articles of Confederation or the Constitution), the three branches of government receive no coverage whatsoever until eighth grade (more below).

Appropriately, the fifth-grade standards do require students to examine the role of representative government in early English settlements, the principles in the Declaration of Independence (helpfully, if cryptically, identified in the sample content), and reasons for the Revolution. Grade 6, which is devoted to ancient civilizations, then touches on Hammurabi’s Code, bureaucracy in China, and the contributions of Greece and Rome, before grade 7 returns to Hawaii, including the rule of Kamehameha I, the overthrow of the Hawaiian Kingdom, and Hawaii’s transition from absolute to constitutional monarchy.

Finally, grade 8 finally brings some expected civics content—the Constitutional Convention, the three branches of government, checks and balances, the Bill of Rights, voting rights, and the emergence of political parties. However, even in the sample content, coverage of most of these critical topics is limited to words or phrases (e.g., judicial review and federalism) in highly compacted laundry lists. Although this is better than nothing, it is hardly a recipe for nuance or depth. For example, there is no mention of *Marbury v. Madison* or *McCullough v. Maryland* (although *Dred Scott* and *Plessy v. Ferguson* do make an appearance).

In short, grades 4–7 are light on traditional civics topics, with no apparent references to topics such as the three branches of the state or federal governments or the contrasting roles of those governments, while grade 8 provides mostly sensible but worryingly cryptic coverage.

High School

Despite its ambiguous content standards and *ad hoc* sample content, Hawaii’s “Participation in a Democracy” course manages to cover numerous bases. For example, it begins with the impact of classical philosophy, natural rights philosophy, and the English common law tradition before moving to the problems and compromises that shaped

the Constitution and its aftermath, including a thoughtful standard that contrasts the perspectives of Jefferson and Hamilton on the federal government’s role in the economy.

With this historical background complete, the course moves to the nuts and bolts of the U.S. government, where the combination of broad standards and cryptic sample content becomes more problematic.

To be fair, many important concepts are called out in the lists provided by the latter, including the Presidential veto and the basics of legislative process (though with no reference to committees). And another standard on “landmark Supreme Court Cases” does reference *Marbury v. Madison*, along with other legal cataclysms including *Plessy*, *Korematsu*, *Brown*, and *Tinker*. In fact, the sample content for this standard, which explains the “significance” of those five cases, plus *Texas v. Johnson* and *Shelby County v. Holder*, with the words “judicial review, upheld segregation, affirmed Executive Order 9066, principle of separate but equal overturned, free speech, free press, privacy, civil rights, [and] voting rights,” is a paragon of cryptic competence. If one had only twenty-three words to spare, those might be the right ones. But who is counting?

Other standards that cover the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, interest groups, the media, the economic functions of the government, and the global role of the United States also tick a lot of boxes. Still, crucial content is missing. For example, other than a lone reference to the Electoral College, there is almost no specific coverage of elements of the electoral process such as redistricting, primaries, campaign finance, and voter access policies. Similarly, there is no discernible coverage of federalism or the role of state and/or local government, nor are there any explicit references to political parties, naturalization, due process, or equal protection (though some of the aforementioned cases do address the last two topics). Finally, there is nothing that could be classified as comparative government—no call to compare and contrast the U.S. system with parliamentary, unitary, confederal, or nonconstitutional systems. In short, there is not enough.

In addition to “Participation in a Democracy,” Hawaii also requires three other high school social studies courses (though the sequence is unclear), all of which include at least some content that could justly be characterized as civics. For example, the “World History and Culture” course touches on

the Enlightenment, the United Nations, and human rights. Similarly, the “Modern History of Hawaii” course reviews the overthrow of the monarchy and political issues emerging thereafter—all potentially fertile ground for civic learning.

Unsurprisingly, the “U.S. History and Government” course (which completes the U.S. History sequence) has the most civics content, covering the Progressive Era, women’s suffrage, and restrictions of civil liberties in times of war, as well as the New Deal, the Civil Rights Movement, modern conservatism, and foreign policy. At least twenty specific acts of Congress are referenced—from the Chinese Exclusion Act to Head Start and Medicare—along with three Supreme

Strengths & Weaknesses of the Hawaii Civics Standards

Strengths

1. The high school course on “Participation in a Democracy” contains some thoughtful content, particularly in the standard on “landmark Supreme Court cases.”
2. The course on “U.S. History and Government” includes numerous acts of Congress, in addition to other civics content.
3. The “inquiry” standards provide reasonable coverage of many skills that are relevant to citizenship.

Weaknesses

1. There is minimal coverage of traditional civics content in grades 4–7.
2. The “Participation in a Democracy” course provides almost no coverage of federalism, electoral process, or comparative government.
3. Organization is needlessly complex and confusing.

Court cases (*Schenk v. United States*, *Brown v. Board of Education*, and *Roe v. Wade*) and the Nineteenth and Twenty-Sixth amendments. Still, many of the holes in “Participating in Democracy” are too big to patch.

Skills and Dispositions

As noted, five “inquiry” standards appear at the beginning of each grade level and course: “developing questions,” “gathering and evaluating sources,” “creating claims,” “communicating conclusions,” and “taking informed action.” Within those buckets, several skill areas that are relevant to civics progress appropriately but somewhat vaguely through the grade bands. For example, the “taking informed action” standard asks students in grades K–2 to “identify ways in which people are trying to address problems or issues in classrooms, schools, or communities” (K-2.5.2), while high school students are expected to “analyze the origins of a problem or issue and explain the challenges and opportunities faced by those trying to address it” (SS.9-12.5.2)—a worthy impulse that deserves more emphasis than the format of the standards permits.

Like the emphasis on skills, the emphasis on civic dispositions is consistent but broad. In the earliest grades, Hawaii offers standards about responsibility, working together, and respect. And in many higher grades, at least one standard somewhat vaguely requires that students learn how individuals can improve their communities or change society. Yet most of these standards would benefit from more thoughtful articulation and concerted integration into the course content, and more emphasis could and should be placed on disagreeing agreeably—that is, on the lost art of civic discourse.

Clarity and Organization: 2/3

Although the unholy combination of strands, anchor standards, themes, and topics makes the content outlines needlessly confusing, the negative consequences are more severe for U.S. History than civics (see the section on the U.S. History standards). Similarly, although the dearth of civics content in grades 4–7 means the standards don’t achieve the requisite depth in some areas (e.g., state and local government), the requirement that students take a course in “U.S. History and Government” in addition to “Participation in Democracy” adds depth in others (e.g., the

government’s role in the economy and the conduct of foreign affairs). Finally, the broad and vague language of the content standards themselves means that most of the heavy lifting is done by the sample content/concepts, where the reliance on laundry lists leads to efficient but somewhat cryptic presentation.

U.S. History: C

In Brief

Hawaii’s standards for U.S. History standards contain some worthy content, but this is often obscured by a needlessly complex organizational structure that emphasizes theme at the expense of chronology.

Content and Rigor: 4/7

K–8

Early grades focus on conventional themes of chronology, perspective, and causation, supplemented by lists of holidays, key events/observances, and historical figures. For example, the “sample content” for grade 1 lists four events, eleven people, five observances, and six cultural holidays. Even accounting for Hawaii’s unique history and geography, these lists can feel a bit random (for example, “nuclear testing in the Pacific,” “end of apartheid,” and “invention of the smart phone”), perhaps because the themes they supposedly help to define are so nebulous (e.g., “looking into our past” and “together we can”). Third grade, which focuses on “migration” and “our changing world,” has just two standards that are identified as “history.” Similarly, grade 4 has just three history standards, all of which focus on “precontact Hawaiian history” (i.e., Kamehameha and the unification of Hawaii).

That changes in fifth grade, which begins Hawaii’s single, overarching pass through U.S. History with a look at “Colonial America and the Early Nation.” To a greater extent than in prior grades, the thematic nature of the standards begins to reveal itself in fifth grade, with the content standards as such offering only broad concepts or ideas, including Native American societies, European exploration,

the role of religion, role of women, enslaved people, and the American Revolution. As in prior grades, specific historical content does appear as sample content. For example, the expectation that students “explain the significance of key battles, alliances, and people on the outcome of the Revolutionary War” (SS.5.6.19.3) is bolstered by the naming of specific battles (Lexington and Concord, Cowpens, Boston, New York, Trenton/Princeton, Saratoga, and Yorktown), alliances (French, Spanish, and Prussian), and figures (Cornwallis, Howe brothers, Lafayette, and Washington). However, because the standards themselves are thematic, chronology is necessarily jumbled.

After grade 6 covers “World History: Beginnings to CE 1500” and grade 7 the “History of the Hawaiian Kingdom” and “Pacific Island Studies” (still with relatively little overlap with traditional U.S. History), grade 8 resumes U.S. History, covering “The Constitution through Reconstruction.” As in previous grades, content is organized into themes, with date ranges that provide a semblance of chronological sequence—e.g., Native America and Western Expansion (1787–1876). However, this framework is undermined by the fact that some themes—e.g., “Industrial America: 1810–1860” or “Slavery: 1808–1861”—have no “history” standards (even though the course is called U.S. History).

A fair amount of historical content does appear in the “sample content” attached to civics, geography, and economics content standards. For example, one grade 8 geography standard requires that students “trace how the United States acquired new territories, including purchases, annexation, treaties, and war” (SS.8.3.16.2), with the sample content supplying details, including “Territorial Acquisition: Northwest Ordinance, Louisiana Purchase, Florida, Texas Annexation, Oregon, Mexican Cession, Gadsden Purchase, Alaska.” However, scattering already uneven content between strands further undermines coherence—and, perhaps because of this scattering, some crucial history is simply missed. For example, there is no reference to ratification of the Constitution, the Washington presidency, the Marshall Court, or the Missouri Compromise.

Perhaps more importantly, although the sample content checks many boxes, “theme” again makes a hash of chronology. Furthermore, the reliance on lists and near-total omission of context or explanation means it can be hard to tell which topics deserve more or less attention. For example, one standard on the conflicts that led to

the Civil War lists states’ rights, Compromise of 1850, Dred Scott, Bleeding Kansas, John Brown’s raids, Lincoln’s election, secession, free-labor ideology, Lincoln-Douglas campaign, pro-slavery arguments, and the Republican Party. Only teachers who already understand the meaning and significance of those items will know what to do with them.

High School

The required U.S. History and Government course picks up where the eighth grade course leaves off, spanning the late nineteenth century to the present. Like the other history-focused courses, this one is organized by quasichronological themes (e.g., “Rise of Conservatism: 1968–2008”), with standards presented through the lens of four strands (civics, economics, history, and geography). For the most part,

Strengths & Weaknesses of the Hawaii U.S. History Standards

Strengths

1. A great deal of essential content appears in the lists of sample content/concepts that accompany the content standards.
2. The skills-focused “inquiry” standards are generally clear and sensible.

Weaknesses

1. Overly complex and thematic organization jumbles chronology and scatters what should be related content.
2. The heavy reliance on laundry lists means that content items lack context and explanation and that more and less important items are often given equal billing.
3. Because the standards make only one pass through U.S. History, the formative Colonial era is relegated to fifth grade and students may not learn the fundamentals of World War II until high school.

the strands manage to integrate historical content—even when content is rather arbitrarily assigned to strands other than “history.” For example, “Civil Rights: 1954–1975” includes only civics and economics standards, but a civics standard that asks students to “evaluate the effectiveness of civil rights organizations and actions in overcoming racial segregation” includes a long list of worthy historical content, including but not limited to individuals (Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King Jr., Medgar Evers, Fannie Lou Hamer, and Malcolm X), events and actions (Montgomery bus boycott, Little Rock Nine, sit-ins, March on Washington, Freedom Rides, and Watts riots), and policy changes (desegregation of the Armed Forces, *Brown v. Board of Education*, Civil Rights Act of 1964, Voting Rights Act of 1965, and affirmative action). This is better than nothing, but it is hardly ideal.

As in K–8, the downside of the high school course’s thematic organization is twofold: First, chronology is again jumbled (for example, 1920s immigration restrictions are covered before the Gilded Age industrial revolution that helped fuel the immigrant wave). Second, the themes themselves can be jumbled internally. For example, the “economics” strand for the civil rights theme requires students to “evaluate the impact of Great Society–era policies in addressing economic, social, and environmental conditions” (SS.US.10.11.2), and the associated sample content includes several pieces of important legislation that have little to do with civil rights as traditionally understood (e.g., the Wilderness Act of 1964, the Water Quality Act of 1965, and the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965). Similar observations might be made about the strands that plague the document. For example, the Platt Amendment is referenced in a *geography standard* on U.S. foreign policy (but why?). Finally, some vital topics are not worked into the themes or strands at all—for example, apart from passing references to the GI Bill and interstate highway system, postwar economic and social change is simply ignored.

Skills Development

As noted in the Civics portion of this review, the same five “Inquiry Anchor Standards” appear at the beginning of each grade level and course. In general, these expectations progress logically across the grades. For example, within the “evaluating sources” standard, students progress from determining whether a source is primarily a fact or an opinion (grades K–2) to identifying specific evidence

that supports claims (grades 3–5) to developing claims and counterclaims while pointing out the strengths and limitations of both (grades 6–8) to analyzing the credibility of sources, using sources that represent a wide range of views, and detecting inconsistencies (in high school).

Clarity and Organization: 1/3

As noted in the Civics portion of this review, several issues make Hawaii’s U.S. History standards less organized and clear than other states’ U.S. History standards, including the obsession with categorization—strands, anchor standards, themes, and topics—and the thematic nature of the standards, which extends to the “sample content.” As discussed, the focus on themes and strands too often makes a hash of chronology (even within individual themes), while also scattering what should be related content across the document. Furthermore, even when related content does appear in consecutive standards, the haphazard color coding sends the message that the standards in question are unrelated. Finally, although the standards would be almost useless without the additional details provided by the “sample content/concepts,” the reliance on laundry lists (with no context or explanation) is particularly problematic given the thematic nature of the standards and often results in more and less important items receiving equal billing.

In addition to these issues, the decision to offer a single, overarching pass through U.S. History relegates the formative Colonial era to fifth grade (while also introducing the possibility that students will not learn the fundamentals of World War II until high school). Furthermore, the sequence itself is murky: For example, the final theme in fifth grade implies that it ends in 1800, even though there is no mention of the Constitutional Convention until eighth grade, which starts in 1785. Similarly, the final theme for eighth grade ends in 1900 (though no event after 1896 is specified), yet the high school U.S. History course ostensibly starts in 1880.

On a positive note, the “sample compelling questions” often serve as compelling setups to orient the content that follows. For example, the high school standard on immigration asks students if society is better served by assimilation or cultural diversity. That is a good question.

Recommendations

Civics

1. **Bulk up the civics content in grades 3–7** (e.g., by introducing the three branches of government in third grade, state and local government in fourth grade, and the principles embodied in the U.S. Constitution in fifth grade).
2. **Bolster the course on “Participation in a Democracy”** (e.g., by adding discrete standards that deal with federalism, electoral process, naturalization, political parties, and comparative government and by adding explicit references to due process, equal protection, and other fundamental principles in the discussion of landmark Supreme Court cases).

U.S. History

1. **Organize content chronologically rather than thematically in history-focused grades.**
2. **Ensure that students make two full passes through U.S. History:** one in the elementary grades and a second, more advanced pass in higher grades.
3. **Bolster the content outlines by addressing the specific gaps noted in the review.**

Both subjects

1. **Simplify the organization** (e.g., by eliminating the “anchor content standards” and “topics” in all grade levels and the color-coded strands in grades 5–12).

Documents Reviewed

- “Hawai’i Core Student Standards in Social Studies,” 2018, <http://www.hawaiipublicschools.org/TeachingAndLearning/StudentLearning/Pages/standards.aspx>

Civics and U.S. History

Idaho

A	Exemplary	10
	Standards worthy of implementation	9
B	Good	8
	Targeted revisions recommended	7
C	Mediocre	6
	Significant revisions strongly recommended	5
D	Inadequate	4
	Complete revision recommended before implementation	3
2		
0-1		
F		

Civics: D

Content & Rigor: 3/7

Clarity & Organization: 0/3

Total Score: 3/10

U.S. History: F

Content & Rigor: 2/7

Clarity & Organization: 0/3

Total Score: 2/10

Overview

Idaho's civics and U.S. History standards are inadequate. Some decent civics content in the early grades is overshadowed by awful presentation and organization, a comparatively weak high school course, and two passes at U.S. History that somehow manage to impart almost no historical knowledge. A complete revision is recommended.

Description of the Standards

Idaho's social studies standards provide outlines for individual grades K-5 and for subject-specific courses in a grade 6-12 band (some of which are assigned more specifically to 6-9 or 9-12 bands). Each grade and course is divided into five strands—history, geography, economics, civics and government, and global perspectives—that Idaho calls standards. Each standard is subdivided into goals, which are identical for each grade and course. If a given goal is relevant to a given grade or course, it is supplied with objectives. If not, it is marked, “no objectives at this grade level.”

A separate “white paper” provides an introductory summary, which explains that the high school Civics, U.S. History, and Economics courses are required for graduation, while other courses, including World History, are electives.

Civics: D

In Brief

Bad organization and a lack of rigor in grades 6–12 overshadow a decent elementary civics sequence.

Content and Rigor: 3/7

K–5

Idaho’s early-grade civics and government standards are clear and to the point. For example, first-grade students are expected to “create rules and explain why rules must be applied fairly” and “discuss how individuals and groups make decisions and solve problems, such as voting and consensus.”

By third grade, Idaho expects students to begin learning some significant content, such as knowing how to “describe services commonly and primarily provided by governments for the community” (3.SS.4.2.3), and fourth grade’s American Indian focus is notably thorough (students are expected to identify each federally recognized tribe in the state, tightly define tribal sovereignty, and learn about the governing structure of each tribe). Finally, fifth-grade content is particularly deep and useful. For example, students are expected to identify “the basic principles of the United States Constitution and Bill of Rights, including popular sovereignty, limited government, separation of powers, checks and balances, judicial review, and federalism (5.SS.4.1.4),” as well as “the difference between direct democracy and the constitutional republic of today’s United States (5.SS.4.4.2).”

6–12

Idaho’s middle and high school civics standards are strongest when they pair specific content with a general statement of principle. For example, one high school standard asks students to “describe the origins of constitutional law in western civilization, including the natural rights philosophy, Magna Carta (1215), common law, and the Bill of Rights (1689) in England” (9-12.G.4.1.1). Often, however, the specifics are lacking. For example, high school students are also expected—vaguely—to “provide and evaluate examples of social and political leadership in American history” (9-12.US.2.4.3.2).

This lack of specificity is both cause and consequence of a more general lack of rigor. For example, the standards for grades 6–9, which focus on Western and Eastern Hemispheric Geography, respectively, ask only that students compare governments in those hemispheres generically. In addition to being unhelpfully vague, this is a wasted opportunity to introduce students to material that is currently addressed at the high school level, when they are expected to “compare and contrast different forms of government, such as presidential with parliamentary, unitary with federal, dictatorship with democracy” (9-12.G.4.5.1).

Ideally, addressing such foundational concepts at the middle school level would free up more space during high school, where Idaho is one of a handful of states to require a yearlong American Government course. Yet the current standards don’t tee up enough content to fill such a course. For example, the expectation that students will “analyze the struggle for the extension of Civil Rights” (9-12.G.4.4.1) doesn’t specifically include any Constitutional amendments or acts of Congress. Too often, the educator is left to fend for herself with injunctions such as “identify the ways in which citizens can participate in the political process at the local, state, and national levels” (9-12.G.4.3.4) and “analyze and evaluate decisions about individual rights in landmark cases of the Supreme Court of the United States” (9-12.G.4.3.4). Here, as elsewhere, “such as” should be Idaho’s watchwords. The more specific the standard, the more likely educators will be able to implement it effectively.

Skills and Dispositions

One paragraph of Idaho’s introductory white paper sets out an ambitious and civics-relevant skills agenda by suggesting that students understand “perspective, bias, and opinion; deductive and inductive reasoning; chronological and historical thinking; research and analysis; data collection and interpretation; issue analysis and decision making,” as well as several other high-level skills. However, many of the listed skills are addressed only obliquely (and insufficiently) in the standards document itself.

Similarly, Idaho expects second-grade students to “identify characteristics of good citizenship, such as courage, honesty, and responsibility” (2.SS.4.3.1). However, this is the last reference to civic dispositions, and the list of characteristics leaves much to the imagination. What about respecting other points of view, informed participation (e.g., voting),

or serving one's community? And is there really no need to cultivate such dispositions further at the middle or high school levels?

Clarity and Organization: 0/3

On a simple usability level, Idaho's civic standards are lacking. There is no table of contents. "Goals" and "Objectives" headings are presented in the same typeface and indentation. And page breaks come only between grade levels, though they could obviously help distinguish between strands. However, the biggest problem is the complex and arbitrary arrangement of such limited content as there is. The division of all content items into strands—even in upper grades—scatters what should be related content and makes cohesive development or explanation impossible. Worse, the rigid division of every strand into the same "goals" in every grade level and course guarantees an arbitrary dispersion of content, even in the middle and high school courses.

Strengths & Weaknesses of the Idaho Civics Standards

Strengths

1. Elementary content is age appropriate and reasonably thorough.
2. Content related to American Indians shows thought and deep knowledge.

Weaknesses

1. Presentation is awful.
2. Much middle and high school content is vague or absent altogether.
3. Organization is poor throughout, forcing what little content there is into arbitrary thematic categories that are rigidly repeated in all grades and courses.

U.S. History: F

In Brief

Idaho's U.S. History standards are inadequate. Enormously broad injunctions and thin, disjointed, thematically scattered content squander the potential of a required, two-part U.S. History sequence in grades 6–12.

Content and Rigor: 2/7

K-5

At the elementary level, the history strand is subdivided into nine goals, five of which apply to U.S. History, including "the cultural and social development of the United States," "the role of migration and immigration," "the sovereign status and role of American Indians," "the political, social, and economic responses to industrialization and technological innovations," and "the role of exploration and expansion" (the other four goals address world civilization).

Early-grade outlines are unambitious, focusing mainly on children's connections to family and community and general references to change in such groups over time. Patriotic symbols and (unnamed) holidays appear in grade 3, together with broad references to migration and immigration, voluntary and forced, and local Indian groups.

Grade 4 turns specifically to "the cultural and social development of the United States." But its scope is murky, and most of the "objectives" that invoke anything specific refer to Idaho history. Only migration/immigration and Indians are mentioned in the introductory blurb. The "objectives" in the history strand refer generically to explorers, missionaries, cultural groups and Indians in Idaho, "significant individuals" in Idaho history (again unnamed), fur trading, gold and silver mining, immigration, and some specific Idaho Indian groups. Other strands add little of substance.

Grade 5's introductory blurb is identical to grade 4's, though the objectives at least make some recognizable references to American history. Still, the content is uselessly vague, with items such as "identify and explain influential

political and cultural groups and their impact on American history” (5.SS.1.1.3) and “analyze the causes and effects of various compromises and conflicts in American history” (5.SS.1.1.6). Other nebulous items, such as “discuss how the establishment of the thirteen original colonies contributed to the founding of the nation” (5.SS.1.1.5) and “explain the history of indentured servitude and the slave trade in the United States” (5.SS.1.2.2), seem almost specific by comparison (the Declaration of Independence, Articles of Confederation, Constitution, and Bill of Rights are at least mentioned in the civics strand).

After some similarly generic references to Western expansion—including such cosmic gems as “the impact of scientific and technological advances” thereupon (5.SS.1.2.6)—grade 5 turns to Indians, giving them almost as much space as the rest of U.S. history in total.

6–12

Commendably, Idaho specifies two required U.S. History courses during the 6–12 grade band (the first assigned to grades 6–12, the second to grades 9–12). In theory, this decision should create ample space for essential U.S. History content. However, unlike most states that divide social studies content by strand, Idaho maintains that division even in the subject-specific courses in grades 6–12. Worse, each strand has the same fixed set of nine “goals,” forcing what little content is offered into arbitrary thematic bins, with little or no sense of chronology or context.

Based on the few references to identifiable history, U.S. History I appears to cover everything from pre-colonization to Reconstruction. Yet content, such as it is, remains absurdly broad. For example, students are expected to “Describe the experiences of culturally, ethnically, and racially different groups existing as part of American society prior to the Civil War” (6-12.US1.1.1.3), which seems reasonable only in comparison to the expectation that they “discuss the causes and effects of various compromises and conflicts in American history, such as the American Revolution, Civil War, and Reconstruction” (6-12.US1.1.1.5).

Similar items touch on immigration, Manifest Destiny, Indian policy, and technological change, before shifting back to exploration and expansion with items such as “summarize the major events in the European settlement of North America from Jamestown to the end of the eighteenth

century” (6-12.US1.1.5.4). Note that some of the few named events—the Monroe Doctrine, War of 1812, Mexican War, and Spanish-American War—actually appear under the global perspectives strand.

Although U.S. History II is evidently meant to cover the time period from Reconstruction to the present, much of the thematically split content remains uselessly vague (e.g., analyze “significant movements for social change” (9-12.US2.1.1.2) or “changes in the political, social, and economic conditions of immigrant groups” (9-12.US2.1.2.3)). A few identifiable topics are mentioned, including twentieth-century migration, some specific legislation affecting Indians, “the rise of industrialization in the nineteenth century,” “social responses” thereto including “the American labor movement” and the Great Depression.

Although *Plessy v. Ferguson* and *Brown v. Board of Education* appear under the civics strand, there is, incredibly, no

Strengths & Weaknesses of the Idaho U.S. History Standards

Strengths

1. Idaho requires two U.S. History courses in the 6–12 grade band, covering all of United States history from presettlement to the present.

Weaknesses

1. Despite the 2-course sequence in grades 6–12, Idaho’s overall handling of U.S. history is inadequate.
2. Subject-specific content is meager at all levels—vague, overly broad, and often amounting to little more than a general injunction to learn a certain period of American history.
3. Organization is poor throughout, forcing what little content there is into arbitrary and reflexively repeated thematic categories that make any sense of chronology or historical context impossible.

other mention of the Civil Rights Movement in U.S. History II. Similarly, the World Wars and a few specific moments in foreign policy appear as fragments under the global perspectives strand, and the economics strand mentions “the role of financial institutions in the economic development of the United States” (9-12.US2.3.3.1).

If Idaho’s students learn anything of U.S. History, it will be thanks to their districts and teachers—not the state’s educational expectations.

Skills Development

Idaho’s standards offer no specific discussion of skills relevant to U.S. History, save for some basic globe and map reading. The closest the standards come to invoking skills are the operative words in the goals and objectives: analyze, trace, identify, discuss, etc. There is no further guidance or development.

Clarity and Organization: 0/3

As noted in the civics portion of this review, the Idaho standards are badly presented and poorly organized.

The rigid system of strands (standards) and goals imposes an arbitrary thematic arrangement on all content at all levels, even the subject-specific courses in more advanced grades. For U.S. History content, this makes even an attempt at chronological development impossible.

Sequence is rarely specified and can only sometimes be inferred from broad references to historical content. Grade 4 seems intended to focus on U.S. History but mostly discusses Idaho. Grade 5 is pretty clearly meant to be a U.S. History course, but it is unclear how far it is meant to go chronologically. The two courses in grades 6–12 seem meant to cover the time period from presettlement to Reconstruction and then from post-Reconstruction to the present, but the content is so meager that it’s difficult to say what’s supposed to fill those blanks.

Recommendations

Civics

1. **Make the expectations for grades 6–12 more specific** (e.g., by identifying the specific powers, rights, amendments, Supreme Court cases, and elements of electoral process that students should know or understand).
2. **Beef up the high school content** (e.g., by having discrete and nuanced standards for each branch of government and for topics such as due process, civil liberties, and equal protection).

U.S. History

1. **Provide substantive U.S. History content guidance for all grade levels** to promote shared exposure to essential content.
2. **Organize content chronologically** instead of fragmenting material between strands.
3. **Strengthen and clarify the coverage aims for the K–5 band** to ensure an introductory overview of U.S. History by the end of elementary school.

Both Subjects

1. **Do away with the goals and objectives** and look for a clearer way to organize content.

Documents Reviewed

- “Idaho Content Standards, Social Studies,” 2016, <https://www.sde.idaho.gov/academic/shared/social-studies/ICS-Social-Studies.pdf>
- “White Paper: Idaho Content Standards, Social Studies K–12,” <https://www.sde.idaho.gov/academic/shared/social-studies/ICS-Social-Studies-White-Paper.pdf>

Revisions to the Idaho social studies standards are currently underway.

Civics and U.S. History

Illinois

A	Exemplary	10
	Standards worthy of implementation	9
B	Good	8
	Targeted revisions recommended	7
C	Mediocre	6
	Significant revisions strongly recommended	5
D	Inadequate	4
F	Complete revision recommended before implementation	3
		2
		0-1

Civics: F

Content & Rigor: 1/7

Clarity & Organization: 1/3

Total Score: 2/10

U.S. History: F

Content & Rigor: 1/7

Clarity & Organization: 1/3

Total Score: 2/10

Overview

Illinois’s civics and U.S. History standards are inadequate. The “disciplinary concepts” are so general as to be useless to teachers, students, parents, curriculum planners, and assessment designers. A complete revision is recommended.

Description of the Standards

Illinois’s Social Science Standards are divided between standards for “inquiry skills” and standards for “disciplinary concepts.” The former are specified for four grade bands (K–2, 3–5, 6–8, and 9–12) but aren’t organized by discipline. The latter are specified for grades K–5 and the 6–8 and 9–12 grade bands. Each of these grades or grade bands are divided into four disciplines (strands): civics, economics, geography, and history. Each discipline is further organized into “topics,” which are furnished with one or more grade- or grade-band-specific standards. Each elementary grade is also assigned a “theme” that is common to all subjects. Each middle school topic also has a “less complex,” “moderately complex,” and “more complex” standard rather than a grade-level standard. However, the high school standards aren’t broken down by grade level or complexity level.

Civics: F

In Brief

Illinois' civics standards are a faint shadow of what state civics standards could and should be.

Content and Rigor: 1/7

K-8

A sense of the generality of the Illinois standards for civics can be gained by noting that the concepts to be covered in thirteen years of education take only two pages to describe and contain only four proper nouns: "Illinois," "United States," "Illinois Constitution," and "U.S. Constitution." No mention is made of any person whose ideas and actions have shaped American government—no Locke, Franklin, Washington, Jefferson, or Madison—no Douglass, Lincoln, Anthony, Chavez, or King. No mention is made of any non-constitutional document that has marked or called for a change in the relation between people and government—no Magna Carta, Bill of Rights, Declaration of Independence, or Gettysburg address—no civil rights, welfare, or regulatory legislation. No mention is made of any social issue that in troubling the United States has revealed the workings of the country's and the state's political and judicial institutions—no slavery, suffrage, immigration, or discrimination—no workplace conditions, wars, or environmental matters.

The civics content in the first six years is designed to expand with the student's personal experience, beginning with nonspecific statements such as, "Describe roles and responsibilities of people in authority" (SS.CV.1.K). It culminates in fifth grade with broadly worded standards such as, "Examine the origins and purposes of rules, laws, and key U.S. Constitutional provisions" (SS.CV.2.5). The lack of any specific content may relate to the introductory observation that "in the last 20 years, the curricular demands on elementary teachers have shifted to a focus on mathematics and English language arts," which seems to suggest that Illinois has abandoned civics (and social studies) education in elementary school.

The middle grades, when one might hope that students catch

up on the civics education they missed in elementary school, also disappoint. In light of the "wide array of ability levels and challenges" and "varying cognitive needs of adolescents," there are no grade-specific standards for grades 6, 7, and 8. Instead, teachers are encouraged to lead students at their own pace through standards of increasing "complexity." For example, the "less complex" standard for the civic and political institutions strand is to "identify roles played by citizens" (SS.CV.1.6-8LC); the "moderately complex" standard is to "describe the roles of political, civil, and economic organizations in shaping people's lives" (SS.CV.1.6-8.MdC); and the "more complex" standard is to "evaluate the powers and responsibilities of citizens, political parties, interest groups, and the media" (SS.CV.1.6-8.MC). Only the last of these approaches the complexity that one might expect of a middle school standard—and even it is hopelessly broad.

High School

The content standards for high school civics occupy less than half a page. The U.S. Constitution, powers, rights, and voting are mentioned but never expanded upon. Crucial concepts such as separation of powers, checks and balances, popular sovereignty, representative government, federalism, and judicial review are omitted entirely. Save for a lone reference to legislative process, there is no reference to any branch of government anywhere in the standards. The reader is told that students should be able to "describe the concepts and principles that are inherent to American Constitutional Democracy"—a phrase whose lack of explication inculcates the standards' authors.

Skills and Dispositions

One place where the Illinois standards do a good job is in the delineation of inquiry skills. These follow the development of the young mind as it grows in sophistication. The standards for grades K-8, for example, focus (in order) on gathering information, distinguishing fact and opinion, evaluating relevance, determining credibility, and dealing with conflicting facts and opinions. The standards for high school can be interpreted to expect students to challenge their own assumptions and views.

The treatment of civic dispositions begins well but finishes with less purpose. The introduction talks about "the need for Illinois students to ... live a life of action—to engage in the workings of our democracy," but the energy in that statement

dissipates by the end of the civics standards. They begin with explaining in first grade “how all people, not just official leaders, play important roles in a community.” They focus on procedures for group decisions in third grade and the importance of civic virtues and democratic principles in fourth grade. They call for a comparison of the “means by which individuals and groups can change societies, promote the common good, and protect rights” in grades 6–8. In high school, students are expected to learn “the role of compromise and deliberation” in legislation, ways to participate in elections and voting, and generally how individuals have “rights, roles, powers, and responsibilities ... in the political system.” The later standards do not mention current events as a reference point for teaching or service learning as an opportunity for learning. By the end, there is less sense of the world outside the classroom door than there was at the beginning.

Clarity and Organization: 1/3

The standards for skills are clear, and those for dispositions are adequate. However, the standards for content are almost nonexistent, filled with vague and repetitive phrases. The

Strengths & Weaknesses of the Illinois Civics Standards

Strengths

1. The “inquiry skills” are clearly presented, logically organized, and highly relevant to civics.

Weaknesses

1. There is a dearth of specific content in all grades.
2. Most standards are far too broad to provide useful guidance.
3. There is little attention to the civic dispositions in high school.
4. There is no reference to the required U.S. Government course in high school.

lack of specific content throughout the document renders it almost useless. Teachers, parents, and students will not find sufficient guidance in this document to understand what is expected.

U.S. History: F

In Brief

Illinois’s U.S. History standards are almost nonexistent, providing insufficient guidance for educators who have the responsibility to teach American history.

Content and Rigor: 1/7

K–8

Illinois’s history strand—for all grades K–12—amounts to only *two pages* in total. The strand is broken, at all grade levels, into the same four conceptual topics: “Change, Continuity, and Context”; “Perspectives”; “Historical Sources and Evidence”; and “Causation and Argumentation.” Notably missing is any reference to historical content.

Grades K–5 get no more than three standards apiece, which are divided between the four topics (not all topics are addressed in each grade). According to the grades’ stated themes, grades K–3 move outwards from students’ personal environment to local and then more distant communities. The standards refer vaguely to shifting perspectives and lifestyles over time and invoke historically significant individuals, groups, and events—but without any examples or even reference to any historical period or place.

Grade 4 is apparently meant to focus on Illinois and its connection to the wider United States. But again, there are no references to any historical period, person, or event—just vague injunctions to “explain connections among historical contexts” (SS.H.1.4) and why people in the same period had differing perspectives, to use sources to “investigate how individuals contributed to the founding and development of Illinois” (SS.H.2.4), and to “explain probable causes and effects of events and developments in Illinois history” (SS.H.3.4).

Grade 5's theme is "Our Nation, Our World." Is this meant to be an introduction to both U.S. and world history? The completely general standards give no clue, beyond an instruction to create a chronological sequence (we aren't told for what) and—the closest we come to any actual scope—"explain probable causes and effects of events and developments in U.S. History" (SS.H.3.5).

Middle school standards actually manage to be even less specific, because unlike the K–5 grades, the 6–8 grade band has no stated theme. Each of the four topics receives a single standard, stated at three levels of increasing complexity. All are purely conceptual, referring in vague generalities to historical events as a phenomenon (no actual events or eras are mentioned), individuals and groups (also purely abstract, with no examples), historical perspectives, study of sources, cause and effect, and construction of arguments from evidence. If U.S. History is meant to be covered in grades 6–8, the Illinois standards give no hint of it.

High School

Illinois's high school history standards aren't divided into courses or subjects, nor, as in middle school, is there any stated theme. The introductory material says that the standards illustrate "overarching themes of what students should know and be able to do at the conclusion of the required high school social science courses," which are to be "embedded" in whatever stand-alone courses are actually offered. Intended scope, if there is any, is impossible to identify from the twelve conceptual standards, which are divided between the same four conceptual "topics." State law requires at least one year of U.S. History for graduation, but you'd never know it from Illinois's standards document.

All twelve high school standards are completely thematic and general. They ask students, for example, to assess "how historical developments were shaped by time and place as well as broader historical contexts" (SS.H.1.9-12), evaluate methods used to promote change, analyze factors that influenced people's perspectives in the past, analyze the impact of individuals (none, of course, are named), and even study "the geographic and cultural forces that have resulted in conflict and cooperation" (SS.H.12.9-12). A single item instructing students to "analyze the concept and pursuit of the 'American Dream'" (SS.H.6.9-12) is the sole reference to the United States—or, indeed, to any specific location.

Skills Development

Unlike historical content, history-related skills are emphasized in the Illinois standards. Indeed, half the document is devoted to "inquiry skills," which are divided into three categories: "Developing Questions and Planning Inquiries," "Evaluating Sources and Using Evidence," and "Communicating Conclusions and Taking Informed Action." Grades K–2 expect students to pose questions, address them through basic research, and distinguish between fact and opinion in sources. Grades 3–5 ask students to identify sources representing multiple points of view, assess the credibility of sources, and construct arguments from multiple sources. Grades 6–8 ask students to move toward independent research; determine the origin, intended purpose, and context of sources; cite sources in research; and construct arguments that address the strengths and weaknesses of source materials (the skills for high school are similar to those for middle school). In general, these skills standards competently touch on core issues of research and analysis, and primary and secondary sources—problematically unmentioned in the section on inquiry skills—that are invoked in the history strand, though only in grades 3 and 4. The origins and context of sources are also expanded upon in and after grade 5, and the distinction between sources and their interpretation is introduced in high school.

Strengths & Weaknesses of the Illinois U.S. History Standards

Strengths

1. Illinois's standards provide a solid overview of history-related research and analytical skills.

Weaknesses

1. There is no U.S. History in the Illinois history standards.
2. There is nothing that educators might use to construct a scope or sequence.
3. There is no reference to the U.S. History and/or U.S. Government courses required by state law.

Clarity and Organization:1/3

As discussed in the Civics section of this review, Illinois’s slim standards document is adequately organized and is generally usable. But beyond some competent presentation of history-related skills, there is nothing of substance to use. The disciplinary concepts are so vague that it would be misleading to speak of a “scope” or “sequence.” The introductory material adds little beyond brief statements that the standards have deliberately abdicated any coverage of substance in favor of conceptual generalities. Educators and other stakeholders will not find sufficient guidance in this document to understand what is expected of students.

Document Reviewed

- Illinois Social Science Standards, <https://www.isbe.net/Documents/K-12-SS-Standards.pdf>

Recommendations

Civics

1. **Ensure that fundamental topics are covered in high school** including but not limited to the separation of powers, the organization of the three branches, federalism and the role of state and local government, the nuts and bolts of the electoral process, the principles of due process and equal protection, and comparative government.
2. **Strengthen the civics content in elementary grades.**
3. **Provide much more specific guidance in all grade levels.**

U.S. History

1. **Outline a substantive U.S. History sequence** to promote shared exposure to essential content.

Both subjects

1. **Add content to the civics and U.S. History standards for all grade levels and bands.**
2. **Correlate the high school civics and U.S. History standards with the requirements of state law.**

Indiana

A	Exemplary	10
	Standards worthy of implementation	9
B	Good	8
	Targeted revisions recommended	7
C	Mediocre	6
	Significant revisions strongly recommended	5
D	Inadequate	4
	Complete revision recommended before implementation	3
F		2
		0-1

Civics: B+

Content & Rigor: 5/7

Clarity & Organization: 3/3

Total Score: 8/10

U.S. History: B

Content & Rigor: 5/7

Clarity & Organization: 2/3

Total Score: 7/10

Overview

Indiana's civics and U.S. History standards are reasonably good. However, some important content around constitutional amendments and the state's racial history is missing, and supplementary material from outside documents contributes to confusion. Targeted revisions are recommended.

Description of the Standards

Indiana provides academic standards in social studies for each K–8 grade and for high school U.S. Government and U.S. History courses. The K–8 standards are divided into four fields: History, Civics and Government, Geography, and Economics. Each field has a standard for the grade in question and a set of subsidiary numbered standards that are grouped into topics or eras and numbered continuously through the four fields. The high school Government and History courses each have several numbered standards, which also have subsidiary numbered standards grouped by topic or era.

From grade 6 through high school, each grade or course includes standards for literacy in history and social studies. In addition, Indiana offers resource guides for grades 4–8 and high school courses including U.S. Government and U.S. History. These contain links to outside resources and sometimes offer additional substantive key terms/topics, which are reviewed here as content guidance for

teachers. Although the resource guides are keyed to Indiana’s previous standards rather than the current version, because the focus of each numbered expectation has generally remained the same, the guides are still usable (and their prominent position on Indiana’s website indicates that the state still intends them to be used).

Civics: B+

In Brief

Despite some deficiencies in content, the Indiana civics standards are strong, and the clarity with which they are presented makes it easy to identify what the state can do to make them even better.

Content and Rigor: 5/7

K-8

Indiana’s Kindergarten and grade 1 civics standards are about learning to live with others in their home, neighborhood, and school communities. Students are taught that they have a right to feel safe and a responsibility to follow community safety rules, and they are expected to internalize and explain the benefits of those rules. The concept of “common good” is also introduced—not yet as a concept in tension with individual rights but as a desideratum of collective action. Meanwhile, national symbols such as the flag, the national anthem, the Statue of Liberty, and the bald eagle are suggested, and students are expected to understand that the Pledge of Allegiance is “a promise to be loyal to the United States” (1.2.5).

Grades 2 and 3 introduce basic political concepts. For example, second graders are expected to understand that all citizens have an equal right to freedom of expression and ownership of property, as well as the concept of government services and the role of specific community leaders such as the mayor and city council. Similarly, third-grade students are introduced to the three levels of government and the idea that each has special responsibilities. Democracy is said to rest on five foundations: integrity, freedom, social equality, majority rule, and minority rights. Students are

asked to discuss the values and importance of being a responsible citizen, and the characteristics of citizenship are differentiated into civil speech (“voicing opinions in a positive way”), voting, and taking action (e.g., running for office). Immigration is used to highlight the meaning of *E pluribus unum*. Finally, the concept of an “issue” is introduced, and students are expected to use information from a variety of resources to demonstrate an understanding of civic issues.

Thereafter until high school, history becomes the avenue for learning civics. For example, the focus in fourth grade is on Indiana history, which also introduces the concepts of federal territory, statehood, and constitution. Appropriately, the state constitution is used to examine the purposes of government as set forth in the Preamble, individual rights protected in Article I, and branches of government and chief offices (in later articles). The standards then proceed to features of modern citizenship, including the right and responsibility to vote, forms of civic virtue, and an excellent standard that asks students to use a variety of resources to research and take a stand on a public issue in Indiana history. However, by skipping the history of government in Indiana, the civics standards largely avoid important lessons about race and segregation though one lonely history standard does address “the Civil Rights movement and school integration in Indiana” (4.1.13).

(More content on Indiana’s racial past appears in a high school course on “Indiana Studies,” but this course isn’t required.)

Fifth grade covers U.S. History until 1800 and thus includes a great deal of civics content, particularly if all the material that appears in the specific standards *and* the examples is covered. To wit, the standards mention the Declaration of Independence, Articles of Confederation, Northwest Ordinance, U.S. Constitution, and Bill of Rights. The examples include the Mayflower Compact, the Fundamental Orders of Connecticut, the Proclamation, Stamp and Intolerable Acts, and the contributions of Benjamin Franklin, George Washington, John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, George Mason, and Alexander Hamilton. Other excellent features of this year include learning about primary and general elections, the separation and sharing of powers, the ways citizens bring about change in government, and the use of different resources to identify and evaluate contemporary issues involving individual rights and the common good.

However, contrary to what Standard 5.2.5 implies, the Bill of Rights does not guarantee the right to vote.

Sixth grade, which covers the history of Europe and the Americas, is an opportunity to learn about American government by comparison. And here the standards could be improved. For example, although classical Greece and Rome are used to illustrate direct and representative democracy, the contributions of Locke and Montesquieu to American political institutions are omitted in the Enlightenment. And although the Magna Carta, Petition of Right, and English Bill of Rights are cited for limiting monarchy, the standards should also state what those limitations protected (initially property and due process and later personal liberty and Parliament). Finally, liberalism and conservatism, socialism and communism, and nationalism and fascism are all well introduced but should be defined on the terminology page.

Eighth grade returns to U.S. History (from 1800 to 1877), and again the civics and government standards are very good. Among other points, they flag the importance of the peaceful transfer of power in the election of 1800 and recognize that the Constitution is based on values that eventually conflict (8.2.10)—a truth that too many state standards miss. However, the reference to “landmark decisions of the Marshall Court” (8.1.13) would benefit from specific examples. And there is a troubling disconnect between the history content and the civics and government content: Given the time period, civics and government should pay *more* attention to the provisions in Article IV about fugitive slaves and the creation of new states, the ruling in *Dred Scott v. Sandford* that blacks could not be citizens, and the Reconstruction Amendments—which aren’t mentioned at all—and less attention to the concepts of due process and privacy, which did not figure significantly in American law until after 1877.

High School

The standards for the high school course on U.S. Government focus on five areas: the nature of politics, the founding of the United States, the institutions of U.S. government, the United States in world affairs, and the role of citizens. If one must choose the material to cover in a one-semester class, these are reasonable choices. However, they do leave the civics and government content from 1877 to 2000 to be covered in the high school course on U.S. History.

In general, the section on the nature of politics and government is excellent, as is the section on the foundations of government in the United States. However, because terms like “natural rights,” “social contract,” and “political factions” appear here for the first time, the standards should, at a minimum, reference Locke’s *Second Treatise* and Madison’s *Federalist 10*. And the standard on ratification of the Constitution (USG 2.7) should mention the colonists’ fear of what national power would do to individuals as well as states.

Similarly, the section on institutions of government does a solid job of covering most topics at both the federal and state level, including elections, legislation, and courts. However, coverage on the federal executive branch is a weak point. Ideally, the standards would expand to address the historical increase in the power of the executive branch, including the discretion claimed by presidents in executing

Strengths & Weaknesses of the Indiana Civics Standards

Strengths

1. The standards include a great deal of worthy civics content, especially if the examples are required learning.
2. In general, concepts are well integrated within and between grades.
3. The skills standards for all grade levels are excellent.
4. The standards are very well written.

Weaknesses

1. There is no reference to amendments after the Bill of Rights in any grade level, and little attention to Indiana’s past legal discrimination.
2. The treatment of Executive power at the high school level is shallow.

the law and the vacuum for executive action created when Congress is dysfunctional.

Finally, the high school course on U.S. History (from 1775 to present) includes among its civics and government topics the impeachment of Andrew Johnson; Black Codes; the Compromise of 1877; the regulation of business in the Interstate Commerce Act of 1877 and Sherman Act of 1890; the “separate but equal” doctrine in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), *Brown v. Board of Education*, and the Civil Rights Movement; the Immigration Reform Act of 1965; the Great Society; *United States v. Nixon*; and legislation that “began to unravel the work of the New Deal and Great Society” [sic].

Notably missing from these standards, however, are the amendments that framed these issues—the Equal Protection and Due Process Clauses of the Fourteenth Amendment and Amendments 16–19, 21, 23–24, and 26—which are not covered in U.S. Government. And the standards on key decisions of the Warren and John Roberts courts (USH 7.5 and USH 9.3) should provide some sort of guidance.¹

Skills and Dispositions

Overall, Indiana’s skill standards are excellent. For example, elementary students are expected analyze and develop solutions for problems in the community. And starting in sixth grade, an excellent set of Critical Thinking Skills in Social Studies are added to the civics content standards. In grades 6–8, these call attention to the meanings of words, the presentation of information, the importance of point of view, the difference between fact and opinion, and the use of supporting evidence. In grades 9–10, they focus on causation and correlation, viewpoint differences, disciplinary vocabulary, and quantitative analysis. Finally, in grades 11–12, they expect the student to understand degrees of certainty, the importance of definitions, and the integration of information from different sources into an effective presentation. A worthy addition would be requiring students to look inward and understand the temptations of confirmation and affinity bias.

Although the citizenship standards in the U.S. Government course are admirable, they lack urgency. To wit, high school students are asked to “describe and discuss current American political issues” (USG 5.9), whereas eighth-grade students are to “defend [a position on an issue] in which fundamental values and principles...are in conflict.” Furthermore, the high

school standard gives no examples, whereas fifth graders are directed to issues such as “proper use of the Internet, smoking in public places, payment of property taxes, development of highways, and housing on historic lands.” The clarity of the younger years ought to be maintained in high school, even if each student chooses a different way to engage or contribute. Finally, although the current title of the high school course is U.S. Government, an even better title and lens would be Civics.

Clarity and Organization: 3/3

The Indiana civics standards are well written, easy to understand, and logical in their progression. However, the Terminology pages could be improved and expanded.² And one key issue that is not clear is the status of the examples in the standards. Are they simply examples of what *could* be taught or what *should* be taught?

U.S. History: B

In Brief

Despite much worthy content, the single U.S. History survey that Indiana offers across grades 5, 8, and high school could be improved, and the decision to relegate some substance to poorly matched Resource Guides introduces needless complications.

Content and Rigor: 5/7

K–8

In early grades, the history strand emphasizes concepts of past, present, and change over time, looking outward from local community to broader society. Suggested examples include a smattering of historical figures, changes in technology, the roles of men, women, and children in society, holidays, and symbols. By grade 2, students are to investigate local history using primary sources. Grade 3 touches on Indiana-region Native Americans and links local communities to the broader region. Finally, Grade 4 offers

the first substantive historical outline, a short but reasonably solid overview of Indiana history.

The main U.S. History sequence begins in grade 5, covering precontact to 1800 in twenty-two expectations. Most of these are broad, though many include suggested examples, usually as lists of names or events without explanation. For example, slavery and town meetings are both mentioned in discussion of colonial regions, but there is no explicit discussion of slavery's establishment or the emergence of local self-government. Similarly, "resistance to imperial policy" (5.1.9) appears in a basic list of events, but taxation and Parliamentary authority do not. Coverage of the Constitution and the 1790s is similar, though the Washington presidency and election of 1800 are at least mentioned among the examples. And the grade 5 Resource Guide adds only a single key terms/topics list of motives for European exploration—with "taxation without representation" oddly tacked on.

After shifting to World History in grades 6 and 7, grade 8 returns to U.S. History, from 1754 to 1877, meaning the early Colonial period is relegated to grade 5's rather thin outline (save for two brief expectations that glance back at Native American contact and European settlement). In general, grade 8's thirty-one expectations are more specific than grade 5's, but most lack examples. However, the Resource Guide includes a fair number of suggested examples as key terms/topics, which are potentially helpful in the many places where the expectations direct teachers toward key points—e.g., the reasons for and consequences of Britain's attempts to maintain North American control in the French and Indian War—without quite offering explanation.

The standards' direct invocation of state constitutions, the precedent-setting Washington presidency, the Jefferson-Hamilton schism, and election of 1800 is welcome. However, coverage of the period from 1801–61 is rushed, though it does touch on territorial expansion and its consequences for Native Americans, the Marshall Court, Jacksonian democracy, industrialization, immigration, abolitionism, and other pre-Civil War reform movements. Problematically, the outline lists "states' rights" before slavery as a cause of the Civil War, and the entire sectional conflict from 1820 on is given very short shrift, save for a list of examples in the Resource Guide. Similarly, the Civil War and Reconstruction receive very little space.

High School

The outline for Indiana's high school U.S. History course, which focuses on the period from 1877 to the present, is more extensive than earlier grades', with a total of seventy-six expectations divided among ten standards. However, as in grade 8, supporting examples are mostly relegated to the Resource Guide.

The expectations vary greatly in specificity and explanatory depth, but on the whole they provide reasonable coverage of key issues and events, including post-Civil War industrialization, Gilded Age society, western expansion and the Indian Wars, immigration, the labor movement, attempts at government regulation, and the rise of Jim Crow—as well as Benjamin Harrison, the only Hoosier to become president. The next standard moves to America's growing global role (including WWI) and Progressivism (where the Resource Guide is particularly strong, offering many examples of issues

Strengths & Weaknesses of the Indiana U.S. History Standards

Strengths

1. Indiana's U.S. History standards include much worthy content, particularly at the high school level.
2. History-related skills, including high-quality standards for literacy in history/social studies, are well integrated into the standards.
3. The standards are very well written.

Weaknesses

1. Indiana's decision to offer a single course across grades 5, 8, and high school relegates the crucial Colonial era to the thinly outlined grade 5 course.
2. The division of supporting examples between the standards proper and the now-outdated Resource Guides causes needless difficulties.

and policies and on the post-WWI peace process). However, grouping early Civil Rights efforts with Progressivism is a problem, as race was a notorious Progressive blind spot.

A section on the 1920s and the New Deal features brief and broad expectations (e.g., “Assess the economic impact of the Great Depression on all Americans”), although the Resource Guide provides a few specifics, including a list of New Deal programs by policy area. Similarly, the WWII section mentions isolationism, fascist leaders, and the Holocaust, but then asks students to “explain the origins of the Cold War” (USH.5.9). And the crucial 1945–60 period receives only four short expectations, noting Cold War containment, the start of the Civil Rights movement, desegregation/*Brown v. Board of Education*, and social change, including the second Red Scare. And the additional specifics provided by the Resource Guide are disappointingly thin here (though they are more helpful for the 1960–80 period).

As is often the case in state standards, the 1970s barely figure after Watergate, though the 1980–2001 section does note the rise of the New Right and Reaganomics, along with the end of the Cold War, some notable court rulings, deindustrialization, NAFTA, and 9/11. A final post-9/11 standard briefly notes pushback against the New Deal and Great Society, the Roberts court, the revival of white nationalism and immigration restriction, and recent presidencies. However, as this segment did not appear in Indiana’s previous standards, there is no matching section in the Resource Guide.

Skills Development

Each grade’s history strand and each history course includes a skills-focused standard or subsection, and in general this is well handled. For example, early grades focus on concepts of chronology, fact vs. fiction, and basic historical resources. Grade 5 introduces primary and secondary sources, asking students to extract the literal meaning from texts and to compare primary and secondary accounts. Grade 8 discusses historical context and historians’ potential bias. Finally, the high school U.S. History course notes historical thinking, locating research sources, identifying limits in historical evidence, assessing competing interpretations, and developing arguments backed by evidence.

As noted in the Civics section, the standards also include ELA standards for literacy in history/social studies for grade

bands 6–8, 9–10, and 11–12—a high-quality resource that stresses close analytical reading of historical sources with an awareness of context and bias, as well as the written presentation of research (a point missing from Indiana’s own skills standards).

Clarity and Organization: 2/3

Indiana’s U.S. History sequence is flawed, as the decision to provide only one full course (across grade 5, grade 8, and high school) means that some crucial content is *only* covered in early grades. Still, it is clearly identified through grade and course titles, and the scope of each grade/course is also clearly identifiable, thanks to the reasonably substantive content outlines.

As discussed under Civics, Indiana’s main standards documents are clear, usable, and sensibly organized. However, the often-important extra content in the mismatched Resource Guides leads to needless complications. And the decision to include skills standards for literacy in history/social studies *within* each grade or course document from grade 6 on is welcome, making these valuable materials readily available with each relevant grade or course.

Recommendations

Civics

1. **Ensure that the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, Fifteenth, Nineteenth, and Twenty-fourth amendments are covered at least once** and develop additional content on Indiana’s past legal racism and the impact of the Fourteenth Amendment’s Equal Protection Clause.
2. **Broaden the treatment of Executive power.**

U.S. History

1. **Offer a full introductory course in U.S. History at the elementary level and a second, more advanced course in higher grades.**
2. **Address specific gaps in coverage, per the review.**

Both subjects

1. Provide more detailed explanations of the material to be learned.
2. Clarify the status of examples.
3. Integrate substantive content from the Resource Guides into the standards.

Documents Reviewed

- Indiana Academic Standards, Social Studies, Grades K–8; United States Government; United States History (1877 to present) (2020); <https://www.doe.in.gov/standards/social-studies#SSStudies>
- “Indiana Academic Standards, History/Social Studies Literacy,” 2020, <https://www.doe.in.gov/standards/social-studies#SSStudies>
- Indiana Academic Standards, Resource Guide, Grades 4–5 (2016); Grade 6 (2015); Grades 7–8 (2016); <https://www.doe.in.gov/standards/social-studies#SSStudies>

ENDNOTES

1. For example, more guidance on key Warren Court decisions could touch on representation (*Baker v. Carr*, *Reynolds v. Sims*, and *Wesberry v. Sanders*), equal protection (*Brown v. Board of Education* and *Bolling v. Sharpe*), criminal procedure (*Miranda v. Arizona*, *Gideon v. Wainwright*, and *Mapp v. Ohio*), speech (*New York Times v. Sullivan* and *Tinker v. Des Moines*), and privacy (*Katz v. United States* and *Griswold v. Connecticut*). More guidance on key Roberts Court decisions could address campaign finance (*Citizens United v. FEC*), commerce power (*NFIB v. Sebelius*), voting rights (*Shelby County v. Holder*, *Marion County v. Crawford*, and *Rucho v. Common Cause*), gun rights (*Heller v. District of Columbia* and *McDonald v. Chicago*), speech (*Janus v. AFSCME*), and sexual orientation (*Obergefell v. Hodges* and *Bostock v. Clayton County*).
2. For example, just two pages of the grade 6 standards include the following words: civil rights, communism, conservatism, democracy, direct democracy, due process, fascism, human rights, ideology, liberalism, monarchy, nationalism, parliamentary government, popular sovereignty, republic, rule of law, socialism, and totalitarianism.

Civics and U.S. History

Iowa

A	Exemplary	10
	Standards worthy of implementation	9
B	Good	8
	Targeted revisions recommended	7
C	Mediocre	6
	Significant revisions strongly recommended	5
D	Inadequate	4
F	Complete revision recommended before implementation	3
		2
		0-1

Civics: D

Content & Rigor: 2/7

Clarity & Organization: 2/3

Total Score: 4/10

U.S. History: F

Content & Rigor: 1/7

Clarity & Organization: 1/3

Total Score: 2/10

Overview

Iowa's current civics and U.S. History standards are inadequate. Vagueness and overbreadth lead to a dearth of specific content in both disciplines, and there is no discernible coverage of U.S. History at the K-8 level. A complete revision of the standards is recommended.

Description of the Standards

Iowa has social studies standards for each grade from Kindergarten through grade 8 and a single set of standards for grades 9-12. Each K-8 grade has a different theme (e.g., "spaces and places" in Kindergarten and "communities and culture" in first grade). The social studies standards for grades K-8 include standards in six color-coded fields, including civics and government and U.S. History. The standards for grades 9-12 are divided into the same six fields, but here the material in each field is to be covered in a separate course. All social studies standards are divided between "inquiry" standards, which deal with the retrieval, evaluation, and processing of information, and "content" standards. They are further divided between recurring "anchor standards" and "specific standards" that change with the grade level.

Civics: D

In Brief

Iowa's civic standards are written so broadly that it's often impossible to say what students are meant to learn, and what elementary civics content does exist is unambitious.

Content and Rigor: 2/7

K-8

Iowa's civics expectations for grades K-4 are vague. Kindergarteners are expected to compare "rules from different places" (SS.K.9) and learn about collaborative decision-making. First graders are expected to "describe a situation that exemplifies democratic principles including, but not limited to, equality, freedom, liberty, respect for individual rights, and deliberation" (SS.1.9). Second grade addresses government "functions" (though no specifics are mentioned), and grade 3 contains more overly vague exhortations, such as "explain how rules and laws impact society" (SS.3.10) and "provide examples of historical and contemporary ways that societies have changed" (SS.3.11). Inexplicably, the fourth-grade standards repeat the third-grade standards nearly verbatim (e.g., "describe how societies have changed in the past and continue to change," SS.4.10). No standards in grades K-4 include any specifics on the structure of national, state, or local government; the identities and roles of government officials; the symbols and slogans of the United States; or the role models they need in order to imagine their future role as citizens.

Fifth grade, which focuses on "rights and responsibilities," brings the first reference to the United States. Students are to learn "how the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution impact the decisions of government, society and/or communities" (SS.5.10). This is an impossibly broad assignment. Furthermore, the wording of the standard suggests that the values in the Declaration of Independence are consistent and that the meaning of the Constitution has been constant over the centuries—assumptions that fifth graders are old enough to learn are not correct.

Finally, the requirement that fifth-grade students "analyze Iowa's role in Civil Rights history" (SS.5.26) is a missed opportunity. There is no reason this standard should not direct the reader to Iowa's interesting history on interracial marriage, universal suffrage, Native American property rights, school desegregation, admission of women to higher education, ties to the Niagara Movement, acceptance of mosques, and case law on student speech rights with decisions like *Tinker v. Des Moines*. Education standards should educate. Yet Iowa's civics standards seem only to point mutely in the direction of content, hoping that districts and teachers will pick up their drift.

In grades 6 and 7, students study the world—first by regions, then by contemporary issues. Remarkably, the social studies standards for sixth grade contain no civics expectations, despite the obvious links to comparative government. Iowa should follow other states, which use the study of foreign countries (often in grades 6 and 7) to highlight the differences between democratic and authoritarian governments, parliamentary and presidential systems, single- and multiparty systems, and so forth.

In seventh grade, Iowa's social studies standards switch formats and include a helpful list of possible global issues students can study: conflict, hunger, population, poverty, health, immigration, education, globalization, and environmental change. The civics aspect of these issues is addressed by a second list of the different players who are involved in these issues, ranging from "global citizens," civil-society organizations, business interest groups, and media to governments acting through laws, treaties, and international agreements. Unfortunately, the standards stop with the lists, rather than requiring that students learn about the interplay of political forces in any of the many important issues they will face in their lifetimes.

The history standards for eighth grade seem to cover American history before the Civil War. Yet the two civics standards are pulled from a list of "twenty-first-century skills" that Iowa adopted several years before the social studies standards. The first standard calls for students to "explain the powers and responsibilities of citizens, political parties, and the media" in a "variety of governmental and nongovernmental contexts" (SS.8.13). The second standard calls for students to "explain the origins, function, and structure of government with reference to the U.S.

Constitution and other founding documents, branches of government, bureaucracies, and other systems and its effectiveness on citizens [sic]" (SS.8.14). Although the wording about "origins, function, and structure of government" and "political parties" could be tied to pre-Civil War history, the language about "bureaucracies" cannot. In short, little thought seems to have been given to how the civics standards fit with the U.S. History standards.

High School

Iowa's high school standards represent the first time the state seriously attempts to ensure that its students know civics. Yet even here, most standards are too broad and vague to provide much guidance. For example, the first standard calls for students to "evaluate the powers and responsibilities of local, state, tribal, national, and international civic and political institutions, how they interact, and the role of government in maintaining order" (SS.Gov.9-12.12.13). This wording alerts no one to the fact that federal government powers are limited, state powers are general, local powers are delegated, tribal powers are permitted, and the powers of international political bodies are rarely backed by force. Some government "responsibilities" are Constitutional duties, while others are the result of exercising discretionary "powers." How governments "interact" depends on a web of regulatory, spending, legal, and political relationships that could be a course by itself. Yet the existing standard gives no guidance on how to navigate or prioritize these issues. Indeed, a teacher who is teaching *anything* about government could claim to be satisfying it.

To give another example, the third standard asks students to "analyze the origins of government with attention to the purposes of government" (SS.Gov.9-12.15). The wording doesn't make clear whether the class should study the political theory of Thomas Hobbes and John Locke, the origin of the cities of Mesopotamia and Greek city states, or the founding debates and documents of the United States. Such broad language makes it impossible to coordinate education or assess the progress of Iowa students against standards.

Some of Iowa's high school standards do deserve praise. For example, one sequence asks students to reflect on the influence of family, school, community, and media—as well as, one might add, peers—on political views in order

to evaluate the effectiveness of voting, debate, contacting officials, campaign contributions, protest, civil disobedience, and other methods in changing government and policy and to take a position on the merits of conviction vs. compromise, majority rule vs. minority rights, and state interests vs. individual interests (SS-Gov.9-12.19-21). Another sequence asks them to evaluate the intended and unintended consequences of public policy and historical and emerging patterns of political action (SS-Gov.9-12.25-26). In general, the high school standards for citizenship are better than the standards for understanding government.

Strengths & Weaknesses of the Iowa Civics Standards

Strengths

1. Iowa pays careful attention to citizenship skills and dispositions from Kindergarten through fifth grade.
2. The development of critical thinking skills is intentionally cultivated from sixth grade through twelfth grade.

Weaknesses

1. Many standards are too broad and vague to provide useful guidance.
2. What K–4 civics content exists is unambitious, even for the age range.
3. The fifth-grade civics standards fail to call attention to or develop Iowa's rich history of Civil Rights.
4. There are no civics standards for sixth grade, despite the obvious links to comparative government.
5. Most essential content is never specifically referenced, even in high school.

Although state law requires that high school students learn about the Bill of Rights and receive voter education on the statutes and procedures for using paper and absentee ballots (IAC 281-12.5(5)b), neither topic is mentioned in the high school standards.

Skills and Dispositions

Iowa's standards for grades 6–12 incorporate standards for critical thinking skills in social studies. In grades 6–8, these standards call for attention to the meaning of words, the presentation of information, the importance of point of view, central ideas and supporting evidence, and the difference between fact and opinion. In grades 9–10, they focus on causation and correlation, viewpoint differences, discipline vocabulary, and quantitative analysis. In grades 11–12, they ask the student to acknowledge degrees of certainty, the importance of definitions, and the integration of information from different sources into an effective presentation. The expectation that students use their knowledge of confirmation bias to critique their own opinions would be a nice addition.

Iowa does a good job of nurturing civic dispositions in the early years, where the standards emphasize working together to address a common problem, the importance of deliberating before taking action, and different methods of decision ranging from majority rule to consensus. However, this effort appears to lose steam in grades 6–8, where the language becomes more boilerplate, and by high school the “[application of] civic virtues” has been changed to a discussion of civic values and analysis of patterns of political action. High school is a time when students should be reasoning and acting as citizens on the sorts of issues identified in the elementary and middle grades, but there is little effort to promote this sort of engagement in the Iowa standards.

Clarity and Organization: 2/3

Iowa's standards are generally usable. However, the content standards aren't consistently formatted, and specific standards aren't always well matched with the anchor standards, which seem to complicate as much as facilitate the presentation of material. As noted, the standards also seem oblivious to the opportunities for civic learning provided by the study of foreign nations, as well as the

United States' own history, and many individual standards are too vague to provide useful guidance to teachers. Finally, vague language and unclear terminology contribute to the confusion in some places. For example, the standards alternate between “civic virtues” and “civic values.”

U.S. History: F

In Brief

Iowa's social studies standards essentially ignore U.S. History before grade 8, and the middle/high school outline is almost without substance. There is little effort to promote shared exposure to essential historical content across the state.

Content and Rigor: 1/7

K-8

The history standards for the early grades focus on concepts of chronology, primary and secondary sources (introduced in grade 1), important individuals and groups (no examples given), and reasons for historical events (again, no examples). Grade 3 then turns to a more specific focus on “immigration and migration,” but the content standards are even more generic, with vague references to changing treatment of “demographic groups,” historical perspective, and cause and effect. Like their counterparts in the civics strand, the history content items for grade 4 are almost identical to those in grade 3. Finally, grade 5 turns to “rights and responsibilities,” but the only specifics are references to the Declaration of Independence and Constitution in the civics strand. In short, there is no discernible U.S. History content in grades K–5.

After grades 6 and 7 cover world regions/cultures and contemporary global studies, grade 8 finally turns to “United States history and civic ideals.” However, the scope of the course is hard to discern, as nothing remotely approaching a substantive outline is offered. The brief introductory paragraph mentions “early American history.” Various strands invoke—but do not discuss—the origins and structure of U.S. government, innovation and entrepreneurship in American history, the influence of regions on culture, factors

in immigration and migration, and the influence of global interconnections on early American history. But content standards remain extremely general and thematic, grouped under the usual fixed set of content anchor standards.

Of the five content standards in the history strand, four are general, asking students to study “connections among early American historical events and developments in broader historical contexts” (SS.8.21), changes in “prevailing social, cultural, and political perspectives” in early American history (SS.8.22), “causes and effects of events and developments in early American history” (SS.8.23), and the structure of Iowa government. Only one item, under the “historical sources and evidence” anchor standard, actually mentions any historical specifics—a bare and scattered list of documents that students might study, “such as the Declaration of Independence, the Bill of Rights, the Constitution, Washington’s Farewell address, the Louisiana Purchase treaty, Monroe Doctrine, Indian Removal Act, Missouri Compromise, *Dred Scott v. Sanford*, and the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo” (SS.8.24).

That is the entirety of U.S. History substance through grade 8.

High School

Iowa’s high school U.S. History course outline is structurally almost identical to the grade 8 outline, save that a few more items make passing references to actual history. Events mentioned (invariably as possible examples, not actual content outlining) range chronologically from the Civil War to the Civil Rights movement and Vietnam, which items are the only clues as to scope: Because the latest event in grade 8’s brief and decontextualized documents list the 1857 *Dred Scott* decision and the earliest event mentioned in the high school course is the Civil War, grade 8 must run from an indeterminate “early American” starting point to the antebellum period, and the high school course must run from the Civil War until at least the 1970s. Or so it would seem.

As in grade 8, content outlining is almost nonexistent in the history strand. Students are to “analyze change, continuity, and context across eras and places of study from Civil War to modern America” (SS-US.9-12.21); study “multiple and complex causes and effects of historical events in American history,” such as the Civil War, the world wars, Korea, and Vietnam; and evaluate Iowans who impacted U.S. History. However, the closest thing to specific content is another

list of unconnected, unexplained primary documents that students might study, ranging from the Reconstruction amendments to Wilson’s Fourteen Points, New Deal acts, Eisenhower’s Farewell speech, *Brown v. Board of Education*, and Martin Luther King’s Letter from a Birmingham Jail.

That is the entirety of Iowa’s high school U.S. History standards: scattered thematic points and a handful of decontextualized specifics offered as seemingly random examples with no meaningful outlining or even a clearly defined course scope.

The behavioral sciences strand adds references to “diverse ideologies” in such eras as Reconstruction, the Progressive Era, and the Civil Rights movement, as well as the impact of gender on U.S. History. Similarly, the civics strand mentions the impact of reform efforts, the economics strand points

Strengths & Weaknesses of the Iowa U.S. History Standards

Strengths

1. There is a reasonably strong emphasis on history-related skills, particularly through the social studies literacy standards provided in an appendix for middle and high school grades.

Weaknesses

1. The standards are almost completely devoid of historical content, let alone explanatory guidance for teachers.
2. Most standards are too broad or vague or do not provide meaningful direction.
3. As far as can be discerned from the standards’ barely defined scope, no meaningful U.S. History coverage is intended before grade 8.
4. Rigid thematic organization would make chronological outlining impossible, if it were attempted.

rather randomly to labor and government efforts regarding capitalism in the Great Depression, and the geography strand piles together references to immigration, urbanization, segregation, voluntary and forced migration, imperialism, and U.S. global involvement after WWII. However, no further specifics are provided.

Skills Development

Where content is absent from Iowa's standards, skills are emphasized. Each K–8 grade and the high school course is prefaced with skills-focused “inquiry standards,” which are divided between a fixed set of six inquiry anchor standards: “constructing compelling questions,” “constructing supporting questions,” “gathering and evaluating sources,” “developing claims and using evidence,” “communicating and critiquing conclusions,” and “taking informed action.”

The actual inquiry standards are not tremendously ambitious in primary grades, mainly asking students to formulate and respond to questions and to identify evidence from multiple perspectives. However, by high school, students are to assess the relative reliability and purpose of multiple sources, assess competing evidentiary claims, and construct and present arguments drawn from multiple sources. The content standards themselves also invoke primary and secondary sources beginning in Kindergarten.

An appendix offers skills drawn from the CCSS ELA and literacy in history/social studies, science, and technical subjects materials for grade bands 6–8, 9–10, and 11–12. These standards are considerably more detailed than the state's own and, unlike Iowa's own skills standards, place heavy emphasis on written presentation of research.

Clarity and Organization: 1/3

As described in the Civics portion of this review, the social studies standards document is usable, though marred by inconsistent formatting, and the organizational structure ill serves what little content there is. With K–5 grades assigned nebulous topics and specific content all but nonexistent, it is impossible to tell whether any actual U.S. History coverage is intended in primary grades. And the two-part U.S. History sequence in grade 8 and high school is barely discernible due to the lack of detail.

Recommendations

Civics

- 1. Provide a rigorous introduction to civics in elementary and middle school** (e.g., by addressing the basics of local government in second grade; citizenship and naturalization in third grade; the three branches of the federal government in fourth grade; the Constitution, Bill of Rights, and struggle for Civil Rights in fifth grade; comparative government in sixth grade; foreign policy in seventh grade; and the Articles of Confederation, Constitutional Convention, debates between Federalists and Antifederalists, and other essential topics in eighth grade).
- 2. Provide more specific and detailed guidance in high school, particularly in the standards that relate to civic and political institutions.**

U.S. History

- 1. Provide substantive U.S. History outlining to encourage shared exposure to essential content.**
- 2. Organize content as the content itself dictates, not by fixed thematic categories.**
- 3. Provide an introductory survey of U.S. History prior to eighth grade.**

Documents Reviewed

- “Iowa Social Studies Standards,” 2017, https://iowacore.gov/sites/default/files/k-12_socialstudies_508.pdf

Civics and U.S. History

Kansas

A	Exemplary	10
	Standards worthy of implementation	9
B	Good	8
	Targeted revisions recommended	7
C	Mediocre	6
	Significant revisions strongly recommended	5
D F	Inadequate	4
	Complete revision recommended before implementation	3
		2
		0-1

Civics: C-

Content & Rigor: 4/7

Clarity & Organization: 1/3

Total Score: 5/10

U.S. History: D+

Content & Rigor: 3/7

Clarity & Organization: 1/3

Total Score: 4/10

Overview

Kansas's civics standards are mediocre, and its U.S. History standards are inadequate. The state's reluctance to clearly define essential civics and U.S. History content is frustrating—especially because it often seems to have the right ideas in mind. In civics, significant revisions are strongly recommended, and in U.S. History, a complete revision is recommended.

Description of the Standards

Kansas's standards document features a mission statement, a description of five overarching social studies standards (each with four supporting "benchmarks"), a discussion of best practices, and a "suggested scope and sequence." However, a set of appendices comprise the bulk of the document and address specific content for grades K-5, the four "middle-level" courses (including Kansas History and U.S. History), and the six "upper-level" courses (including U.S. History and U.S. Government, both of which are graduation requirements). Suggested content topics for grades K-4 begin with a discussion of cultural and socioemotional competencies before dividing into four strands—history, civics/government, geography, and economic [*sic*—each with an introduction, list of key ideas, sample "compelling questions," and target competencies. Organization is similar for grades 5-12, except that suggested topics are organized by time period or subtopic (although the competencies are still organized by strand).

Civics: C-

In Brief

Kansas has compiled representative concepts and interesting questions for school districts and teachers to use in teaching civics, but these are neither complete nor (according to the document) instructionally required. Often, the standards document deals with major civics issues in a few words or a sentence, though the skills expectations are better.

Content and Rigor: 4/7

K-8

In the early grades, students are gradually introduced to civic concerns of increasing scope. Kindergarten introduces the basic ideas of self, friends, leaders, authority, rules, and citizenship. Grade 1 suggests discussing rights and responsibilities that flow from rules at home and school, the traits of a good citizen and leader, and the office of the presidency. Grade 2 proposes that students broaden their horizons to consider the technology that has connected people in Kansas with the rest of the country and learn about important U.S. landmarks, sites and symbols, and the Constitution as the source of rights they enjoy. Grade 3 contains excellent suggestions for explaining the ways citizens can fulfill their civic duty, the services and leaders of local government, the importance of equal protection, and the notion that communities may be different. It also expects each student to demonstrate self-discipline, engage in conflict resolution, and identify and take informed action on a common problem of the school or community. Finally, grade 4 further widens the civics lens to include other states and regions of the United States and includes the suggestion that students know the political units of city, county, state, and country and understand that states, too, have constitutions.

Starting in fifth grade, each grade is organized around one discipline, with the expectation that related learning in other disciplines will occur. Consequently, fifth grade also marks the point at which suggested civics learning becomes distinctly less specific, as every course that is suggested has “history” or “geography” in its title until the

capstone course in upper-level United States Government. The grade 5 appendix covers U.S. History through 1800 and includes units of suggested instruction on the Declaration of Independence and Constitution. However, there are no civics competencies relating to the former and almost no specific competencies that relate to the latter beyond a bullet on “the responsibilities and powers of the three branches of government” and a suggestion that students be able to discuss “key United States Constitutional concepts and principles.” For fifth-grade students, these principles could easily include popular sovereignty, separation of powers, checks and balances, and federalism (and there is no good reason why an outline should not suggest these to school districts).

World history until 1300 CE, which is the focus of sixth grade, is important to civics because of the classical roots of certain forms of government and the idea of citizenship, the feudal origins of English rights, and the opportunity for comparative studies. The appendix for Middle-Level Ancient World History does a good job of introducing forms of democracy, types of nondemocratic government, and the significance of published codes of laws. However, more detail on the rights protected by Magna Carta (property and due process) or not protected by it (expression, religion, and equal protection) would help to highlight the differences between feudalism and society today. And inexplicably, Kansas uses ancient world history as the time when a student “explains the origins and structures defined by the United States Constitution,” which sounds like something that belongs in the fifth grade content.

State history, which is the focus of the seventh grade, also presents an opportunity to learn civics. For example, state creation and popular sovereignty (which are mentioned) would be an excellent segue to the Preamble and Article IV of the U.S. Constitution (which aren’t mentioned). It is not clear why the outline mentions European and American encroachment and assimilation of indigenous peoples but not the Louisiana Purchase, the Indian Removal Act of 1830, the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854, or the Dawes Act of 1887. Notably, *Brown v. Board of Education* makes an appearance, though it’s the only case interpreting the U.S. Constitution that does.

Finally, the last middle-level course is U.S. History from the Constitution through “international expansion”—i.e., 1787–1900. However, although the course description for

this year says that it begins with a review of constitutional principles, the only principles mentioned are federalism and separation of powers. In general, the civics competencies expected for this grade, which call for knowledge of the “powers and responsibilities of citizens, political parties, media, and interest groups in creating public policy,” do not match the nineteenth-century history being studied.

High School

As elsewhere, there is the possibility of good civics learning in Upper-Level Modern World History. However, where specific concepts, such as popular sovereignty and inalienable rights, are included, they are framed as optional rather than as key topics.

Similarly, the upper-level U.S. History course covers a period full of civics potential. Yet the suggested content favors movements over moments: “Progressivism” is mentioned, but there is no mention of the Civil Service Act, the Sherman Act, or the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Amendments. Suffrage is included, but the Nineteenth Amendment is not. The Civil Rights movement is covered, but the 1964 Civil Rights Act and 1965 Voting Rights Act aren’t. And Environmentalism never resolves into the NEPA, the Clean Air Act, or the Clean Water Act.

In the course on upper-level United States Government, Kansas offers the only class principally focused on civics. And contrary to earlier statements about optional content, the Past Learning paragraph makes it clear that students, in fact, “should” come to the class with a basic knowledge of democracy, the influence of the Enlightenment, the principles of the Declaration of Independence, the relationship of those principles to the Constitution, the three government branches, separation of powers, checks and balances, and Civil Rights.

Seven units of study are then suggested, covering the role of the citizen, principles of the Constitution, structure of the federal government, human and civil rights, role of government in domestic and foreign policy, state and local government, and politics, interest groups, and the media. The unit descriptions are worded so the student must understand not only the current state of affairs but how matters have “evolved,” “changed,” or “grown” over time. Sample questions show that the authors have experience getting students to think for themselves: “Is government necessary?”

“Why compromise?” “How much government is too much government?” “Which of the three branches wields the most power?” “Is civil disobedience justified?” “How should the United States’ ideas on human rights influence its foreign policy?” “What level of government is best able to protect the rights of minority groups?” and “How should we decide what to believe?” These questions are evergreen. However, as in other grades and courses, the unit descriptions are so generally worded that it is a stretch to say they constitute “standards.” For example, the topic sentence of the first unit says that “students will examine democracy in the United States and how citizens participate in the governing of the nation.” Similarly, the “ideas” are lists of words students apparently should be able to use, but putting them on paper does not establish them as a standard. Concepts such as civic values, substantive due process, and rule of law place an enormous burden on the classroom teacher to get right. A definition or other guidance would be helpful. To say that students should know “the Enlightenment” is not helpful and not a standard.

Strengths & Weaknesses of the Kansas Civics Standards

Strengths

1. The sample compelling questions provided for each suggested content topic encourage students to think critically.
2. There is an explicit and coherent effort to cultivate civic virtue across all grade levels.
3. The high school course has potential.

Weaknesses

1. The presentation suggests that some truly essential content is optional.
2. The standards often rely on broad terms instead of providing specifics.
3. The current formatting makes the document difficult to use.

Skills and Dispositions

The standards document recognizes that an essential part of being an informed citizen is having the skills to locate and use credible sources of information. And the sample compelling questions—particularly those on power, competing values, and deciding what to believe—are creative, age appropriate, and likely to encourage critical thinking. However, the standards document doesn't mention or link to the rigorous reading and writing standards for literacy in history/social studies, science, and technical subjects for grades 6–8, 9–10, and 11–12, which are still part of Kansas's College and Career Ready Standards.

Commendably, the dispositions to show respect, participate, and help others are written into the cultural and social-emotional character development competencies from an early age. Beginning in grade 5, students are expected to demonstrate civic virtue in their own lives. By grade 8, they are to recognize their obligations to others. Patriotism is mentioned at the beginning (grade 2) and the end (U.S. Government). Finally, knowledge of current events is a competency of the U.S. Government class.

Clarity and Organization: 1/3

Given the work that went into it, the standards document is not as clear as it should be. Most importantly, it doesn't clearly distinguish between suggested and required content. To wit, the standards document repeatedly states that “the specific content contained in the suggested units is not mandated,” that the document “is not a state-mandated curriculum for how and when content is taught,” and that the choice and timing of content instead is “left to local districts.” These multiple statements suggest that Kansas requires no particular civics content at any grade or in any course (though in other subjects, Kansas does have clear, statewide content standards). And yet, the state does expect some concepts to be learned by the time students enter the high school U.S. Government course. And other statements make it clear that Kansas does expect, and will assess, the mastery of certain civics skills—namely, the standards and benchmarks and the civics competencies listed at the end of each course outline.

In addition to their ambiguous status, the standards and benchmarks around which the Kansas document is built

don't specifically target civics or U.S. History, and their mastery would not constitute mastery of civics or U.S. History. To be fair, Standard 2 (“Individuals have rights and responsibilities”) *relates* to civics, and Standard 4 (“Societies experience continuity and change over time”) points in the *direction* of history. However, Standard 1 (“Choices have consequences”) applies to all human activity. And Standards 3 and 5 (“Societies are shaped by the identities, beliefs, and practices of individuals and groups” and “Relationships among people, places, ideas, and environments are dynamic”) are statements of sociology. Although the 2020 Standards are a significant improvement over their 2013 counterparts, the ideas in Standards 3, 4, and 5 could be expressed in a smaller number of more precisely stated principles.

Finally, the standards document is full of standards, benchmarks, best practices, steps for higher learning, disclaimers, instructional narratives, content outlines, ideas, sample questions, and cultural, social-emotional, and subject-matter competencies. Yet with so much material intertwined and repeated, even determining which grade or course one is reading is difficult. Adding headers or footers with the grade or course title, separating instruction from content, and differentiating sections by margins or type would be a considerable improvement.

U.S. History: D+

In Brief

Kansas intentionally avoids providing any specific content guidance, leaving local districts to fill in the gaps. The result is a set of general pointers that do little to ensure that students share exposure to essential historical content.

Content and Rigor: 3/7

K-8

Though the Kansas history strand identifies key concepts, lack of specificity undermines their usefulness. The suggested sequence and optional guidelines for K-2 move

outward from students' family and social environment, touching on Kansas symbols, lifeways of early Kansas settlers and Native Americans, national holidays and symbols, immigration, local and national landmarks, pioneers, and local Native American tribes—but without providing specifics. Grade 3 suggests a focus on Kansas but, again, provides little specific content. Grade 4 invokes “Kansas and United States regions” and includes broad references to transportation systems and trail networks, explorers, and so forth.

The first clearly defined U.S. History material appears in grade 5, which covers everything from ancient Native American settlement to the 1790s and forms the first part of a single U.S. History survey that continues through middle and high school. From the start, Kansas attempts to justify its broad and general approach by insisting that “it would be impossible for students to learn, for example, about the Founding Fathers without also learning about Alexander Hamilton and Thomas Jefferson, so they do not appear in this outline.” And the content for each era is indeed both broad and general. Each era's short introductory paragraph specifies very basic issues, followed by a decontextualized list of “ideas” (for example, the list that follows European exploration includes “European search for wealth and resources,” “Imperialism,” “conflict,” “conquest,” and “spread of Christianity”). In addition to these ideas, the sample compelling questions ponder various issues. However, they are too random to add much substance to the outline. Still, topics such as the rise of slavery, Enlightenment ideas, taxation without representation, limited government, separation of powers, and other points are mentioned.

Coverage remains extremely general in the middle school U.S. History course, which divides the period from 1787 to 1900 into five eras. The introductory texts become somewhat more substantive, but the “ideas” lists remain fragmentary and stripped of context. The first era (1787–1830s) jumbles Jacksonian democracy together with Constitutional concepts, the Monroe Doctrine, and judicial review—and none of them are explained. The second, covering regionalism and expansion (1800s–1850s), mentions industrialization in the North and entrenchment of slavery in the South (and incorrectly refers to the first Industrial Revolution as the second). The third era (1850s–1861) simply directs students to “explore the different points of view” that emerged from sectionalism, as well as “how the failure

of compromise” led to the Civil War and to evaluate slavery and abolitionism “in historical context.” The centrality of slavery to secession is noted (though, strangely, nullification is mentioned *after* secession). Reconstruction is marked largely by noting its end, and the final unit (1870s–1900) mentions the facts of Westward expansion, industrialization, immigration, Populism, Progressivism, organized labor, and the spoils system but doesn't explain or contextualize them.

The middle school Kansas History course adds little to U.S. History coverage—though it does, at least, add a few fragmentary references to issues such as popular sovereignty and slavery in the territories.

High School

Like previous courses, the high school U.S. History course (which covers everything from the late nineteenth century to the present) advertises its incompleteness. “It may seem as if important ideas, people, places, and events are missing from this outline,” the introduction observes. And, indeed, they are.

The course starts with immigration, industrialization, and the Progressive movement, but almost no details are provided for the first two themes, save that both had social and economic consequences. And the section on expansion and imperialism is even briefer, tossing in terms such as “yellow journalism” and “spheres of influence” without explanation. The section on WWI and the 1920s invokes the reasons for U.S. involvement (which aren't identified), the war's impact on democracy, and postwar consumerism, with an “ideas” list that randomly tosses in such points as rationing, communism, the Harlem Renaissance, immigration restriction, and suffrage. The Depression and WWII section is even briefer, simply directing students to understand the Depression, Dust Bowl, government response, and the role of the U.S. in WWII. Similarly, the “ideas” list mentions the New Deal, Socialism, “roles of women and people of color,” appeasement, the League of Nations, Fascism, and the Holocaust but doesn't tie them together. And the summary for the subsequent era is a single cosmic sentence: “Students will evaluate the impact of the Cold War and Civil Rights on the social, cultural, environmental, economic, and political fabric of the United States”—followed by an “ideas” list that includes containment, McCarthyism, the domino theory, the “industrial military complex” [sic], Great Society,

segregation, the Civil Rights movement, counterculture, and a few other items. Finally, the summary for the “Modern Era” section suggests that students “examine domestic and foreign policy decisions” after the Cold War and analyze the current “political, economic, and social landscape.” The associated “ideas” list then mentions polarization, terrorism, globalization, immigration, national security, and “truth in the age of the Internet” before culminating in the spectacularly vague “ideology vs. pragmatism” and “the future.”

In short, the high school course does point to key themes in modern U.S. History. However, by leaving nearly all of the specifics to districts and teachers, it largely abdicates its role in providing meaningful content guidance, thus ensuring that U.S. History education will be wildly uneven across the state.

Skills Development

Target skills are specified in the “competencies” that appear under various headings at various points in the standards document, in the “best practices” overviews, and in the

benchmarks under the five overarching thematic standards. The benchmarks, which appear repeatedly throughout the document, ask students to analyze context and develop evidence-based theses relating to human choices, individual rights and responsibilities, social identities and beliefs, continuity and change over time, and “dynamic relationships.” The best practices invoke high-level reading (including identifying context, bias, authorial intent, and use of evidence) and effective writing/communication (including a commendable emphasis on rewriting and revision, stressing writing as well as digital presentation). Use of primary sources is also directly addressed.

“Competencies” for the history strand introduce primary and secondary source analysis and comparison of different accounts of the same event by grade 2; framing “important historical questions” and evaluation from “multiple perspectives” by grade 3; and source and context of primary sources by grade 4. Starting with the subject-specific U.S. History course in grade 5, greater emphasis is placed on the source and context of primary documents. Middle school history competencies add demonstrating knowledge of a time period or era, discussing specific instances of change over time, demonstrating understanding of causes and impact of specific events, and assessing context and relevance of multiple sources; high school history competencies are similar, with an additional emphasis on creating an interpretation or narrative.

Strengths & Weaknesses of the Kansas U.S. History Standards

Strengths

1. Kansas does a reasonable job of specifying history-related skills expectations.

Weaknesses

1. Kansas’s decision to avoid specific content guidance abdicates a key role of state standards: promoting shared exposure to essential content across the state.
2. The single survey of U.S. History across elementary, middle, and high school relegates the crucial Colonial era to the elementary level.
3. The current formatting makes the document difficult to use.

Clarity and Organization: 1/3

As discussed in the Civics portion of the review, the Kansas social studies document is an overly complicated jumble of content and repeated conceptual segments that is needlessly hard to use. Although the scope and sequence framework does define basic topics for grades K–3, its U.S. History content is so vaguely defined that there is little sense of scope. And grade 4’s “Kansas and the Regions of the United States” is no better. Once the U.S. History sequence begins in grade 5, sequence and course scope are quite clear. However, the lack of specific content guidance remains a major problem, as does the relegation of earlier historical periods to grade 5.

Recommendations

Civics

1. **Align the civics competencies with the material being learned in each grade and course.**

U.S. History

1. **Offer two full passes through U.S. History** (one at the elementary level and a second in higher grades).

Both Subjects

1. **Provide more specific content guidance for each grade and course** to promote shared access to essential knowledge.
2. **Simplify the format of the material for each grade or course.**

Documents Reviewed

- “Kansas History, Government, and Social Studies Standards,” 2020, <https://www.ksde.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=s6aaq11LZjY%3d&tabid=472&portalid=0&mid=4744>

Kentucky

A	Exemplary	10
	Standards worthy of implementation	9
B	Good	8
	Targeted revisions recommended	7
C	Mediocre	6
	Significant revisions strongly recommended	5
D	Inadequate	4
	Complete revision recommended before implementation	3
F		2
		0-1

Civics: C

Content & Rigor: 4/7

Clarity & Organization: 1/3

Total Score: 5/10

U.S. History: C

Content & Rigor: 4/7

Clarity & Organization: 1/3

Total Score: 5/10

Overview

Kentucky’s new civics and U.S. History standards are mediocre, thanks to a needlessly complex coding system, critical gaps in content, and a plethora of vague or overbroad standards. Much greater clarity and specificity are needed, especially at the high school level.* Significant revisions are strongly recommended.

Description of the Standards

Kentucky organizes its social studies standards around four “inquiry practices” (questioning, investigating, using evidence, and communicating conclusions), all of which are to be pursued through the “lenses” of four “disciplinary strands” (civics, economics, geography, and history), which are themselves subdivided into “disciplinary concepts and practices.” For example, the history strand includes change and continuity; cause and effect; conflict and compromise; and Kentucky history.

Each K–8 grade begins with a brief overview, followed by charts laying out the inquiry practices, any relevant disciplinary practices and concepts, and the grade-level standards associated with these concepts and practices, which are color coded by strand (and invariably housed under the “investigating” inquiry practice). Finally, a further chart lays out “disciplinary clarifications” that include substantive explanations for those subject-specific standards.

Organization at the high school level is similar, except that content is divided by strand (i.e., by subject) instead of by grade. Notably, Kentucky is one of a handful of states that don't specifically require students to take courses in U.S. History or civics in high school, though it does require three years of "social studies" that are meant to include the content in its high school social studies standards.

Civics: C

In Brief

Kentucky's civics standards are mediocre due to the scant attention given to the nuts and bolts of government, fundamental information about elections, and individual rights. The high school standards, in particular, are very short and broad.

Content and Rigor: 4/7

K-8

In Kindergarten and first grade, where the focus is on local and state governments, the importance of rules, and a citizen's role in the community, several disciplinary clarifications seem unrealistic (e.g., discussing municipal courts with kindergartners or discussing the right to alter or abolish the government with first graders). However, it is in grades 2 and 3, where the broader social studies framework deals with North American and global "interactions," that the biggest problem with Kentucky's civics standards emerges—namely, a lack of specificity. For example, students are to study "rights" in second grade, but no right other than voting is mentioned. Similarly, a third-grade standard (3.C.RR.1) asks teachers to "Examine how the government maintains order, keeps people safe, and makes and enforces rules and laws in diverse world communities," but does not indicate what forms of government students should know (though the disciplinary clarifications do mention the constitutional monarchy in Spain and the parliamentary democracy in India). In short, even with the accompanying clarifications, many standards are simply too nebulous to be of much use (e.g., "Describe how societies changed and

continue to change through processes, rules, and laws in North America").

This recurring vagueness becomes even more problematic in fourth and fifth grades, which focus on the Colonial period through ratification of the Constitution. This framing should provide plentiful opportunities to discuss the three branches of government, their basic functions, and the differing roles of local, state, and national governments. Yet the standards don't call out these topics explicitly, and even the disciplinary clarifications mention them only cursorily. For example, we learn that "the legislative branch makes the laws," but there is no discussion of how an idea becomes a law or how laws are enforced. And the Bill of Rights is nowhere to be found (though the principles of the First Amendment, at least, are well within the grasp of ten- and eleven-year-olds).

In sixth and seventh grades, where the history standards cover the ancient, medieval, and early modern worlds, civics appears to be an afterthought, with standards mentioning mainly nonessential concepts drawn from these historical eras. There are missed opportunities to articulate the concept of rule of law (e.g., the Code of Hammurabi). Democracy in ancient Athens and the Roman Republic are briefly mentioned in the disciplinary clarifications, but don't appear in the standards themselves. Finally, the seventh-grade history standards cover the Enlightenment, yet the civics standards don't use this era to introduce foundational ideas about natural rights and limited government.

Vagueness and over-breadth also characterize the civics standards for eighth grade, which focuses on U.S. History from the Colonial era through Reconstruction. For example, standard 8.C.CP.2 expects students to "Explain the origins, functions and structure of government, with reference to the Declaration of Independence, Articles of Confederation, U.S. Constitution, Bill of Rights and other founding documents, and their impacts on citizens." But what key concepts from these documents must every student know? And why, save for a single mention of freedom of speech in first grade, is this the first reference to the Bill of Rights?

Regardless of the rationale, the lack of emphasis on the First Amendment and the federal court system, as well as the total absence of basic concepts such as due process and political parties by the end of eighth grade, is a disservice to students.

High School

Essential detail is missing in many high school standards. For example, one standard expects students to “analyze legislative, executive and judicial branch decisions in terms of constitutionality and impact on citizens and states” (HS.C.CP.2). But it would be better if each branch had its own standard, with core concepts like judicial review, the Commerce Clause, and administrative agencies specifically called out. And the same could be said of the Bill of Rights, which is at best obliquely referenced in a standard about how the judicial system upholds “due process and inalienable rights” (HS.C.CP.4). (At the very least, the standards should explicitly refer to the First, Fourth, and Sixth amendments.) Finally, elections and federalism (which are included in laundry lists) deserve their own standards so the most important sub-topics can be specifically called out. At a minimum, the elections standard should include the primary system, the Electoral College, redistricting, campaign finance, and voter access. Similarly, the federalism standard should at least explore the Supremacy Clause and how states can act as “laboratories of democracy.”

On a positive note, the high school standards do ask students to analyze unintended consequences of public policies, suggesting that they are expected to reason with some degree of subtlety.

Skills and Dispositions

As further articulated in the grade level standards, Kentucky’s four “inquiry practices” seem well suited to civics. For example, it’s heartening to see the K–5 standards repeatedly emphasize the importance of listening (under the “communicating conclusions” skill), comparing multiple perspectives (as part of the “using evidence” skill), understanding the difference between fact and opinion, and being able to identify who created a source material and why. Similarly, middle school students are asked to contextualize evidence and understand its limitations, while high school students are expected to engage in civil discussion and respect diverse opinions.

In general, Kentucky deserves praise for highlighting civic-mindedness and individual action. For example, the introduction to the social studies standards expresses the hope that they will prepare graduates to “Understand the fundamental values and principles of America’s democratic republic, using civic mindedness to be informed citizens,

foster civic dispositions and be life-long participants in the political process.” To back this up, the standards emphasize democratic dispositions and active engagement in the community with “Roles and Responsibilities of a Citizen” and “Civic Virtues and Democratic Principles” concepts that are embedded in each grade. Especially in grades K–5 and high school, the standards are notably direct and explicit when it comes to asking students to identify elements and/or examples of good citizenship and civic participation.

Clarity and Organization: 1/3

Kentucky’s social studies standards are usable but hardly user-friendly. The division of content into strands, sub-strands, and sub–sub-strands, which are further divided

Strengths & Weaknesses of the Kentucky Civics Standards

Strengths

1. There is a strong emphasis on civic engagement at all grade levels.
2. The skills standards for social studies serve civics particularly well, further bolstering the cultivation of essential civic dispositions.

Weaknesses

1. Many standards are too vague to provide useful guidance.
2. The high school standards are particularly broad and brief.
3. Coverage of critical topics such as the Bill of Rights, electoral process, and federalism is inexplicably cursory.
4. Despite taking their cues from the history content, the middle school civics standards miss obvious opportunities for interdisciplinary alignment.

into thematic “disciplinary concepts and practices,” is unfortunately typical of the “social studies approach” and generally detrimental to coherence in any particular subject, including civics. Similarly, the presentation of charts with color-coded blocks, followed by additional charts mapping the standards from the first charts onto “disciplinary clarifications,” is confusing and unwieldy.

Despite extensive introductory material laying out the purposes, philosophy, and organization of the standards, it’s also unclear whether the high school subjects are meant to be taught as individual subjects or concurrently in a unified social studies class (as the language in the introduction seems to imply). The decision is presumably left to local districts. But, given the overlap between civics and U.S. History (as well as other subjects), some discussion of how the material is meant to be used would be helpful.

U.S. History: C

In Brief

Nominally, Kentucky offers two U.S. History sequences: one in fourth and fifth grades, the second in eighth grade and high school. Yet neither sequence is remotely comprehensive, and the first covers only the period between the start of European exploration and ratification of the Constitution. In general, the manner in which Kentucky divides content between strands and sub-strands is problematic, often obscuring chronological development and arbitrarily splitting related content. The level of detail provided by the standards is also inconsistent and, in some cases, inadequate—particularly at the high school level.

Content and Rigor: 4/7

K-8

Kentucky’s organization of social studies content by thematic subdivisions of disciplinary strands rules out any attempt at chronology, and often results in historical content being spread across multiple strands. Perhaps as a result, several standards tell students to consider chronological developments that are never specified. Furthermore, many

standards are extremely general. For example, students in fifth grade are expected to “Analyze the causes of the American Revolution and the effects individuals and groups had on the conflict” (5.H.CE.1). Although the disciplinary clarifications add some specifics, these are notably uneven. And since Kentucky explicitly leaves specific content to teachers or districts, even these clarifications seem to be suggestions rather than requirements.

In the early grades, the standards focus on community, state, and global ties, with little specific detail. Kindergarten looks at local communities. First grade adds Kentucky, past and present. Second grade offers some substance on North American Indian societies and European contact, emphasizing cultural differences such as concepts of land ownership, in addition to touching on rather random points about European exploration and technology. Finally, third grade focuses on “global interactions.”

Fourth grade begins the first U.S. History sequence, covering “migration and settlement.” Colonial self-government is mentioned under civics, where New England town meetings and the Virginia Burgesses are noted in the disciplinary clarifications. Economics mentions British control over Colonial trade. Geography mentions the slave trade. Finally, the history strand broadly invokes developments in Colonial life, relations with Native Americans, and “different groups” in Kentucky, but provides little specific guidance.

Fifth grade continues with “Colonization to Constitution,” and the civics disciplinary clarifications for this grade discuss the shift from the Articles of Confederation to the Constitution broadly but intelligently. However, the themes in the history strand again make a hash of chronology. The Constitutional tradition (including initially unequal rights and protection of slavery) is followed by the cotton gin, then by the causes of the American Revolution (where some specifics are included, though even here the Stamp Act and the Proclamation of 1763 are reversed) before jumping back to religious freedom in the colonies, the slave system, and compromises at the Constitutional Convention.

Because sixth grade and seventh grade are devoted to world history, the second U.S. History sequence begins in eighth grade (which is meant to cover 1600–1877). Here, more standards are offered than in the elementary grades, but they remain both chronologically chaotic and very broad (e.g., “Explain the role changing political, social and economic

perspectives had on the lives of diverse groups of people in the Colonial Era”). And the disciplinary clarifications add only scattershot detail. The history strand, dipping in and out of issues from the Colonial period to Reconstruction, offers some substantive discussion and occasional detail, including the main British provocations before the Revolution and important moments of antebellum tension. A discussion of diverging Northern and Southern economies and labor systems is notable, but it remains isolated among fragmentary items that lack context, coherence, or chronology (8.H.CO.4).

High School

The history section of the high school standards, which is meant to cover from 1877 to the present, is woefully brief. Excluding the skills-based strands, there are a total of eighteen history standards, most of which are very broad. For example, students are expected to “Analyze changes to economic policies, the size of government and the power of government between 1890–1945” (HS.UH.CH.2), to “Evaluate domestic responses to migration and immigration in the United States from 1877–present” (HS.UH.CO.2), and to understand and analyze “the events that caused the United States to emerge as a global power between 1890–1991” (HS.UH.CE.2) as well as “the ways in which groups facing discrimination worked to achieve expansion of rights and liberties from 1877–present” (HS.UH.CE.5).

Many topics are noted in a general way, including economic policies and institutions, labor and working conditions, technology, global affairs, industrialization, booms and busts, fights for rights, U.S. expansion, immigration and migration, global conflicts, Cold War ideologies, and post-Cold War “conflict and compromise” between the U.S. and “other nations, groups and individuals.” But little else is said about these subjects.

Skills Development

Three skill-centered strands—“questioning,” “using evidence,” and “communicating conclusions”—are included for each K–8 grade and the high school course, with the goal of developing increasingly advanced skills across grade levels. However, the questioning strand remains vague even at the high school level (e.g., “Generate compelling questions to frame thinking, inquiry and/or understanding of key concepts in U.S. History,” followed by generating “supporting

questions”). In contrast, the evidence strand is more specific, introducing the concept of primary and secondary sources in second grade, evoking multiple perspectives in sources by third grade, and, by high school, looking at the credibility of sources, gathering multiple sources, etc. Finally, the conclusions strand focuses on using examples and evidence, presenting different claims from different sources, and engaging in discussions and “democratic discourse,” etc.

Clarity and Organization: 1/3

The division of social studies content into strands, sub-strands, and sub-sub-strands, which are further divided into thematic “disciplinary concepts and practices,” is particularly detrimental to the study of history. Because the standards pay no attention whatsoever to chronology, it’s impossible for teachers and students to construct any sense of a historical outline from the standards document. Teachers or districts are expected to address this challenge as they select and assemble their own content from other sources—an approach that is likely to result in needless repetition, as well as gaps in coverage.

Strengths & Weaknesses of the Kentucky U.S. History Standards

Strengths

1. Kentucky devotes approximately three grades of elementary and middle school to U.S. History.
2. Some specific topics receive sophisticated discussion in the “disciplinary clarifications.”

Weaknesses

1. Treating knowledge as primarily a means to skill-building leads to erratic content coverage.
2. Thematic organization largely supplants chronological organization, undermining any clear sense of historical sequence.

As noted, despite extensive introductory material, Kentucky doesn't indicate how or in what grades the four strand-based high school courses are to be taught, making the challenge of sensibly connecting U.S. History to civics and other sub-disciplines even more daunting.

Recommendations

Civics

1. **Provide much more specific guidance, especially in high school.**
2. **Discuss the organization, powers, and functions of the three branches of government in greater detail** (e.g., by giving each branch its own discrete and nuanced standard).
3. **Strengthen and expand coverage of the Bill of Rights, federalism, and elections** (e.g., by devoting at least one discrete and nuanced standard to each of these topics).

U.S. History

1. **Provide much more specific and detailed guidance.**
2. **Organize historical content chronologically.**
3. **Offer a full introduction to U.S. History in elementary school.**

Both Subjects

1. **Reduce the number of organizational layers and visually simplify the standards document** (e.g., by reducing the complexity and number of tables).
2. **Specifically require that high school students take at least one year of U.S. History and one semester of civics.**

Documents Reviewed

- “Kentucky Academic Standards: Social Studies,” 2019, https://education.ky.gov/curriculum/standards/kyacadstand/Documents/Kentucky_Academic_Standards_for_Social_Studies_2019.pdf

** Prior to the release of this report, the Kentucky Department of Education alerted the Thomas B. Fordham Institute to the existence of a separate document that contained “disciplinary clarifications” for high school civics and U.S. History. However, we were unable to update our review to reflect that information prior to publication.*

Had we had the opportunity to do so, it’s possible that Kentucky’s overall grades would have been slightly higher. Regardless, Kentucky’s civics and U.S. History standards (including its high school standards) need improvement, and our top-line recommendations for strengthening them are essentially unchanged by the contents of the “disciplinary clarifications” for high school.

Louisiana

A	Exemplary	10
	Standards worthy of implementation	9
B	Good	8
	Targeted revisions recommended	7
C	Mediocre	6
	Significant revisions strongly recommended	5
D	Inadequate	4
	Complete revision recommended before implementation	3
F		2
		0-1

Civics: C

Content & Rigor: 4/7

Clarity & Organization: 2/3

Total Score: 6/10

U.S. History: B+

Content & Rigor: 6/7

Clarity & Organization: 2/3

Total Score: 8/10

Overview

Louisiana's history standards, when combined with various well-wrought companion documents, offer extraordinary depth. However, its civics standards are mediocre, due to some organizational flaws, particularly the absence of a companion document for high school civics.

Description of the Standards

Louisiana's main social studies standards document offers separate outlines for each grade, K–8, and for four high school courses. Within this document, each K–8 grade is divided into four strands—history, geography, civics, and economics—that are subdivided into standards, which are in turn supplied with grade-level expectations or GLEs (and the structure is similar for the high school courses, though they aren't divided into strands). However, Louisiana also offers Companion Documents for grades 3–8 and for high school U.S. History, which reorganize the GLEs from the strands into thematic (but history-focused) units that are split between Essential and Ancillary content (though the latter “should not be cut from instruction”).

Although GLEs from the civics strand are integrated into grade 3–8 Companion Documents, there is no Companion Document for high school civics.

Civics: C

In Brief

Although key concepts sometimes get lost in the shuffle, the K–8 civics standards are strong. By contrast, the high school standards suffer from a lack of detail and the omission of core material.

Content and Rigor: 4/7

K–8

Louisiana’s elementary civics standards are unusually ambitious. For example, although the civics standards for Kindergarten and first grade cover rules and responsibilities, second grade features a (brief) introduction to the three branches of government, as well as local, state, and federal elections. And the pace quickens noticeably in third grade, where students are expected to assess the powers and responsibilities of the three branches of local and state governments and take another pass at state and national elections. Here, the first of many Companion Documents adds substantial detail (including unusual content, such as the role of a sheriff and helping a community via environmental stewardship). However, some of the content, such as the Electoral College, might not click with third graders, especially when it’s only covered as Ancillary content.

Things only get more rigorous in fourth grade, which is jam-packed with ambitious civics content. Students in this grade are to study the Declaration of Independence, review the three branches of government (this time with an emphasis on checks and balances and separation of powers), and learn about the amendment process, the Bill of Rights, and the Fourteenth Amendment, as well as the evolution of voting rights and the naturalization process. However, some of the content, such as why the Fourteenth Amendment was interpreted differently in *Plessy v. Ferguson* and *Brown v. Board*, seems like a stretch for fourth grade. So perhaps saving the Fourteenth Amendment and the evolution of voting rights for a later grade and focusing on the First Amendment instead of the entire Bill of Rights would better serve students.

As outlined in the Companion Document, the three GLEs associated with fifth-grade civics play second fiddle to history (although some of the history GLEs have implications for civics, such as the extensive coverage of religious freedom in colonies). Tucked into the nearly twenty pages of Priority Content and Concepts is a suggestion to “compare and contrast Colonial government structures and ideals with the current government system of the United States.” Yet it’s hard to believe there’s time to do that well along with everything else, and the GLE which addresses the rights and responsibilities of citizens in present-day government is relegated to a single Ancillary content point in the Companion Document (GLE 5.7.1).

The only two civics GLEs for sixth grade (which covers the first half of World History) address the development of democracy in Greek city-states and the government of the Roman Republic. Commendably, the Companion Document treats these GLEs with significant detail and asks students to explicitly link Greece and Rome to later democratic governments. However, it doesn’t make similarly clear connections between the Code of Hammurabi and Magna Carta and modern rule of law.

Seventh grade, which focuses on U.S. History through Reconstruction, asks students to drink from a firehose. On the plus side, the Essential content offers deeper analysis of the structure of government (including federalism), *Marbury v. Madison*, the relationship between the fledgling United States and other nations, and the expansion of voting rights. However, some critical civics topics (such as how a bill becomes a law and the various forms of government) are considered Ancillary content, while others (such as the civics implications of the Civil War Amendments) are underplayed. And this, in combination with the voluminous nature of the Priority Content and Concepts, makes effective coverage of all civics GLEs difficult to imagine.

In eighth grade, which focuses on Louisiana history, students are expected to compare the governments of Louisiana and the United States; assess how constitutional amendments, key statutes, and Supreme Court decisions have affected the state; and offer examples of citizens impacting the government. In general, reviewing these civics concepts through a new lens should help students understand them more deeply.

High School

The absence of a Companion Document for high school civics is unfortunate, as almost all the high school GLEs would benefit from additional detail. For example, one GLE asks students to “(e)valuate the five basic goals of United States foreign policy and explain the role of government in their implementation” (GLE C.3.1). It would be nice to know what those goals are. Similarly, it’s impossible to determine the actual contents or scope of ambitious but nebulous GLEs such as, “Compare and contrast the structure and leadership of different forms of government in various nations” (C.1.2).

Numerous topics receive short shrift at the high school level. For example, one GLE asks students to “explain the distribution of powers, responsibilities, and limits on the United States government” (GLE C.2.3). Yet, aside from one GLE about how a bill becomes a law and another that deals with judicial philosophies, there is no specificity, no sense of evolution, and no identification of the big issues for any of the three branches of government. Similarly, a standard on “examining the meaning and implications of the Bill of Rights and subsequent amendments” (GLE C.2.6) doesn’t prioritize key amendments or guarantee that students will understand First Amendment freedoms, the Fourth Amendment, or criminal due process protections. Finally, although Louisiana rightly calls out campaign finance, special interest groups, and the Electoral College in a standard on elections (GLE C5.5.5), it neglects equally important topics such as the primary system and redistricting.

In addition to these oversights, the topic of federalism is missing entirely. And a standard that asks students to “describe how Civil Rights have evolved over time to include diverse groups of citizens” (GLE C.5.3) is as close as any GLE gets to specifying the Fourteenth Amendment or the Voting Rights Amendments at the high school level (though, in theory, these topics are covered at the K–8 level). Meanwhile, there is an unusual emphasis on how government generates and allocates revenue, with eight separate GLEs covering everything from different types of taxes to the macroeconomic policies of the Federal Reserve System. Presumably, this is because Louisiana doesn’t require a separate high school course on economics. But if so, the obvious solution is to establish such a requirement, not to shortchange other, equally vital civics topics.

Skills and Dispositions

Despite much “comparing,” “describing,” and “explaining” in grades K–8, there is no expectation that students master more sophisticated skills, such as distinguishing between fact and opinion or detecting bias (though the history skills do include things like comparing differing perspectives). Similarly, although the high school GLEs begin with verbs like “evaluate,” “analyze,” and “differentiate,” no specific civics skills are defined and called out (though one GLE does ask students to examine the media).

As for the cultivation of civic dispositions, there are GLEs for grades K–5 and 7–8 related to rights and responsibilities and/or how citizens can influence government, and the

Strengths & Weaknesses of the Louisiana Civics Standards

Strengths

1. The K–8 standards provide comprehensive and frequently sophisticated coverage of most essential civics content.
2. The three branches of government receive multiple passes.
3. The high school standards provide unusually strong coverage of the U.S. government’s impact on the economy.

Weaknesses

1. Many of the high school civics GLEs are vague, and fundamental topics such as federalism aren’t mentioned explicitly.
2. There is a risk that core civics content will be overlooked because they are relegated to “ancillary content.”
3. There is little attention to skills and little effort to link the material to current issues or events.

Companion Documents for third and fourth grade provide particularly thoughtful detail about what makes a good citizen and how individuals can impact their government and community. However, although one high school GLE addresses civic participation broadly, specific forms of civic engagement, including voting, aren't addressed.

Clarity and Organization: 2/3

From a civics perspective, it's hard to understand why Louisiana has put some material (like how a bill becomes a law at the federal level) in Ancillary rather than Essential Content. Meanwhile, the placement of some comparatively advanced topics is too aggressive. For example, third graders are expected to understand the Electoral College, fourth graders are expected to understand the Fourteenth Amendment, and fifth graders review excerpts from the Mayflower Compact, Colonial charters, and Magna Carta.

At the high school level, the bare GLEs, sans Companion Document, make the content and scope of many standards impossible to determine. And because the Civics course also tries to be an Economics course, neither discipline gets proper coverage.

Finally, although the Companion Documents that do exist include explanatory introductions, which indicate that teachers are expected to rely on them, Louisiana would do well to explain the relationship between the standards and Companion Documents within the standards themselves.

U.S. History: B+

In Brief

Louisiana's social studies standards often provide remarkable U.S. History depth, especially in its generally impressive Companion Documents. However, organizational and sequencing flaws need attention, unrealistic detail for early grades needs rethinking, and the status of the various documents needs clarification.

Content and Rigor: 6/7

K-8

K-2 history content, which appears under a "historical thinking skills" standard in the history strand, includes chronological concepts; unspecified famous Americans, symbols, and holidays; and some general references to early exploration, Indians, and westward migration. However, the pace accelerates in grade 3, which introduces the first standard that addresses specific historical content (on Louisiana history), as well as the first companion document.

Here and in higher grade levels, that document adds a plethora of substantive and explanatory details—arguably more than third graders can realistically be expected to handle. Yet it doesn't address the role of slavery in the state's early history (though there is an oblique reference to "African cultural influences"). Similarly, the Companion Document provides most of the detail for grade 4, which focuses on a somewhat jumbled range of U.S. History that includes "early America," the growth of democracy, westward expansion, immigration, industrialization, urbanization, and the impact of technology.

Grade 5 begins the state's formal U.S. History course, covering from the ancient peoples of the Americas to 1763. Again, the main standards point competently to key issues, but most of the explanation appears in the companion document where the level of detail is often remarkable (though the thematic units sometimes jump around chronologically). But again, it seems unlikely that a fifth-grade class could actually cover all of the "priority

content” (can fifth graders really be expected to explore Colonial passenger lists and draw conclusions about regional settlement or read excerpts from Colonial charters and Magna Carta?). Meanwhile, two of the most important topics for this period—namely, the emergence of slavery and of self-governing institutions—could arguably be given *more* emphasis.

After a year of world history, grade 7 covers the second third of U.S. History, from the American Revolution to Reconstruction—and again, the companion document provides remarkably substantive detail. For example, students are expected to “describe key precedents set by George Washington for future presidents and their influence on the development of the United States (presidential cabinet and departments, transfer of power after two terms, executive restraint with vetoes, role of the vice president)” (7.2.4)—crucial points barely mentioned by most states. However, the thematic arrangement of content continues at times to undermine chronology. For example, the Louisiana Purchase and Jackson’s Indian removal appear together with Pinckney’s Treaty (which was signed in 1795!) in a GLE on westward expansion after 1800.

Finally, grade 8 covers Louisiana history. Here the actual standards are both broad and brief, but the companion document is packed with rich detail and information, including difficult subjects such as Jim Crow, the Klan, and lynching. Importantly, secession is correctly attributed directly to the defense of slavery.

High School

The high school U.S. History course covers from the post-Reconstruction period to the present—meaning that content from earlier eras is *not* revisited at a more advanced level. This is truly unfortunate, as much of the often-remarkable content that is laid out in the Companion Documents for grades 5 and 7 is very advanced for the age range: the pre-high-school Companion Documents include the grade 5 Companion Document, for example, which includes Colonial charters, Navigation Acts, the Great Awakening, religious toleration, an entire very detailed unit on the French and Indian war, and much more, all material that might be more realistically and successfully addressed at the high school level.

As before, the standards themselves offer a solid but broad outline of key issues, while the companion document offers substantive and explanatory depth on numerous topics, such as Populism (covered in exceptional detail), Immigration, machine politics, Social Darwinism, the settlement house movement, and specific strikes and labor movements. Thematic arrangement continues at times to disrupt chronology (the Chinese Exclusion Act and other later events appear in the Companion Document before the 1862 Homestead Act).

Points that are missing from many other states’ standards include the Wilson administration’s WWI restrictions on free speech, the 1920s resurgence of lynching and the Klan, and the Hoover administration’s attempted responses to the Depression. And substantive detail continues through later eras; discussion of including the Civil Rights movement even includes such points as *de jure vs. de facto* segregation.

Strengths & Weaknesses of the Louisiana U.S. History Standards

Strengths

1. Louisiana’s broad but reasonably substantive standards are greatly enhanced by the detail and explanatory depth offered in the Companion Documents.
2. The standards emphasize history-related skills alongside content, and the Companion Documents spell out topics/exercises through which they can be applied.

Weaknesses

1. The U.S. History sequence is flawed, with only the post-Reconstruction period covered in high school and with unrealistic (albeit impressive) detail provided for grades 5 and 7.

However, chronology continues to be an issue, with the end of the Cold War discussed alongside the Civil Rights movement (*before* Cold War events in the Middle East) and Reagan’s Iran-Contra scandal discussed alongside Watergate (*before* the Reagan presidency itself). The modern era is particularly jumbled, with the Reagan-Bush revival of the conservative movement appearing *after* the Great Recession and some Obama-era policies.

Skills Development

Louisiana puts considerable, direct emphasis on history-related skills. Each history strand and the high school U.S. History course opens with a historical thinking skills standard. In early grades, the skills-based GLEs introduce simple chronological concepts and the concept of primary sources. By grade 4, students are expected to define and distinguish between primary and secondary sources, conduct basic research, and write up conclusions. And by high school, they are expected to draw and present conclusions from a broad base of sources, evaluate the intent and bias of documents, and so forth.

For grades 3–8 and the high school U.S. History course, the Ancillary content sections of the Companion Documents are also devoted to skills GLEs, and the associated material often includes exercises that are designed to hone the skills in question.

Clarity and Organization: 2/3

Louisiana’s main standards document is clear and straightforward. The various Companion Documents are more complex, as they attempt to integrate GLEs from multiple strands into new chronological/thematic units (sometimes undermining chronology) while also adding a dramatic amount of more specific content guidance; however, they are not difficult to follow.

Similarly, the scope of the standards in the grades that cover U.S. History is clear (with the exception of grade 4’s rather jumbled amalgam of content). However, Louisiana’s reliance on a single U.S. History sequence spanning grades 5, 7, and high school is flawed, as it means everything through the Revolution is only covered in grade 5, while the early Republic, Civil War, and Reconstruction are *only* covered in

grade 7. Furthermore, the detail specified in the Companion Documents is often unrealistic for those grade levels.

Finally, although the Companion Documents include explanatory introductions, which indicate that teachers are expected to rely on them, Louisiana would be well advised to explain the relationship between the standards and Companion Documents within the standards themselves.

Recommendations

Civics

1. **Develop a Companion Document for the high school civics course**
2. **Ensure that federalism and the Fourteenth Amendment are covered in high school.**
3. **Ensure that essential civics content isn’t relegated to ancillary content in the Companion Documents for grades 3–8 (and save topics like the Electoral College and the Fourteenth Amendment for higher grade levels).**
4. **Add civics-related skills to the standards, similar to those provided for the history strand.**

U.S. History

1. **Shift some of the impressive U.S. History content from the K–8 level to a full high school survey and provide a more basic U.S. History introduction in earlier grades.**

Both subjects

1. **Clarify the status of the companion documents in the main standards document and/or on Louisiana’s social studies website.**

Documents Reviewed

- “Louisiana K–12 Student Standards for Social Studies,” 2011, https://www.louisianabelieves.com/docs/default-source/academic-curriculum/standards---k-12-social-studies.pdf?sfvrsn=24665cc3_33
- “Louisiana Student Standards, Social Studies Companion Document, 3rd Grade,” https://www.louisianabelieves.com/docs/default-source/academic-curriculum/grade-3-social-studies---companion-document.pdf?sfvrsn=3030931f_11
- “Louisiana Student Standards, Social Studies Companion Document, 4th Grade,” https://www.louisianabelieves.com/docs/default-source/academic-curriculum/grade-4-social-studies---companion-document.pdf?sfvrsn=7276931f_4
- “Louisiana Student Standards, Social Studies Companion Document, 5th Grade,” https://www.louisianabelieves.com/docs/default-source/academic-curriculum/grade-5-social-studies---companion-doc.pdf?sfvrsn=6676931f_6
- “Louisiana Student Standards, Social Studies Companion Document, 6th Grade,” https://www.louisianabelieves.com/docs/default-source/academic-curriculum/grade-6-social-studies---companion-document.pdf?sfvrsn=3730931f_9
- “Louisiana Student Standards, Social Studies Companion Document, 7th Grade,” https://www.louisianabelieves.com/docs/default-source/academic-curriculum/grade-7-social-studies---companion-document.pdf?sfvrsn=89f2911f_8
- “Louisiana Student Standards, Social Studies Companion Document, 8th Grade,” https://www.louisianabelieves.com/docs/default-source/academic-curriculum/grade-8-social-studies---companion-document.pdf?sfvrsn=62c901f_8
- “Louisiana Student Standards, Social Studies Companion Document, U.S. History [High School],” https://www.louisianabelieves.com/docs/default-source/academic-curriculum/u-s-history-social-studies-companion-document.pdf?sfvrsn=635b911f_6

Revisions to the Louisiana social studies standards are currently underway.

Civics and U.S. History

Maine

A	Exemplary	10
	Standards worthy of implementation	9
B	Good	8
	Targeted revisions recommended	7
C	Mediocre	6
	Significant revisions strongly recommended	5
D	Inadequate	4
F	Complete revision recommended before implementation	3
		2
		0-1

Civics: F

Content & Rigor: 1/7

Clarity & Organization: 1/3

Total Score: 2/10

U.S. History: F

Content & Rigor: 0/7

Clarity & Organization: 0/3

Total Score: 0/10

Overview

Maine’s civics and U.S. History standards are inadequate. Especially in history, the standards provide no usable guidance. In civics, some key words and catchphrases provide direction, but not nearly enough. If Maine is serious about statewide standards for these subjects, its students and citizens deserve a total revamp.

Description of the Standards

Maine’s social studies standards are divided into four strands: civics and government, personal finance and economics, geography, and history. Each strand has a single, overarching “standard.”

Under each strand’s standard, charts lay out “performance expectations” for individual grades at the K–5 level and for the 6–8 and 9–12 grade bands. In the 6–8 and 9–12 bands, these expectations are followed by sub-items divided between “F” (foundational) and “D” (developmental) columns. Notably, Maine requires only one course in U.S. History *and* government at the high school level.

An introductory chart lists nine eras for U.S. History and six for world history.

Civics: F

In Brief

Maine’s standards largely fail to articulate what comprises a solid civics education. Vague references to structures, processes, and rights provide districts and teachers with almost no explicit guidance regarding the shape of their curricula.

Content and Rigor: 1/7

K-8

The civics standards for Kindergarten, first grade, and second grade are devoted to local, state, and federal government, respectively. However, students in each of these grades are expected to understand “key ideas and processes that characterize democratic government in the community and the United States,” as well as how rules and laws promote the common good and the peaceful resolution of conflict. Similarly, standards for all three grades ask students to learn about symbols, monuments, celebrations, and leaders. And students in first and second grades also study the traditions of Maine Native Americans.

Despite their breadth, the performance standards for these early grades are less problematic than those for higher grades, where the material is more sophisticated and the lack of specificity more noticeable. For example, third grade topics include how leaders are elected, how laws are made, and how citizens can influence government. Fourth grade focuses on the legislative, executive, and judicial branches in Maine and the state’s constitution. Fifth grade looks at the national government’s three branches, the U.S. Constitution, the Bill of Rights, and the idea of civil disobedience. Yet nowhere in the K-5 performance standards does one find the phrases “separation of powers” or “checks and balances.” Nor is there any mention of any discrete rights in the Bill of Rights.

The fifth grade “Civics and Government 1” performance expectation is illustrative. It suggests that students “understand the basic ideals, purposes, principles, structures, and processes of democratic government

in Maine and the United States by explaining that the structures and processes of government are described in documents, including the Constitution of the United States.” But what principles, structures, and processes does Maine consider basic?

Oddly, there are no grade-specific requirements for grades 6–8—only three big-picture expectations that apply to all middle school students. One of these focuses on the structures and processes of government, including federalism, checks and balances, and the rule of law. The second highlights legal rights, civic responsibilities, and the role of citizens in a constitutional democracy. (Sub-items include individual and minority rights laid out in the Constitution and the Bill of Rights, as well as examples of courts protecting such rights.) The third expectation returns to issues of diversity and unity.

With more specifics, all three of these expectations could be highly substantive, but in their current form they are skeletal. Big concepts like the rule of law, checks and balances, and federalism appear as bare phrases. Voting receives some attention as a way to influence the government, but there is no discussion of elections, political parties, or the evolution of voting rights. (And once again, there’s no reference to any specific right in the Bill of Rights.) Finally, although the words “structures and processes of the United States government” appear twice in the middle school standards, there is no further mention of the three branches of government or their functions.

High School

The high school civics content, like that in grades 6–8, consists of three exceedingly broad performance expectations, again highlighting government structures and processes, rights and responsibilities, and cultural diversity. While the phrases “constitutional principles” and “American political system” are used repeatedly, they fail to convey to teachers and districts what Maine considers essential content.

Take “Civics and Government 1” (F2), “[Explain] how and why democratic institutions and interpretations of democratic ideals and constitutional principles change over time.” So much possible ground is covered in that sentence, but there are no further details. Throughout the high school standards, there are passing references to the U.S. Constitution, the

Bill of Rights, “landmark court cases,” federalism, “founding documents,” and voting, but that is as detailed as Maine gets. Once again, the three branches of government go unnamed, as do any specific powers and responsibilities. And if any individual rights in the Bill of Rights deserve special attention, the performance expectations again fail to indicate it.

The word “election” does not appear in the high school performance expectations, to say nothing of the Electoral College or the primary system. And the Fourteenth Amendment is nowhere to be found. Although students are asked to compare government structures and rights in the United States with those in other nations, there is no discussion of how the U.S. interacts with other countries via treaties, trade, etc.

Skills and Dispositions

Notably, the civics performance expectations for second grade, fourth grade, middle school, and high school are that students will select, plan, and participate in a civic action or service learning project. However, although Maine deserves praise for encouraging students to convert whatever knowledge they acquire into action, the civics standards do not call for critical thinking beyond understanding the themes of diversity and unity. The ability to distinguish between fact and opinion, correlation and causation, and intended and unintended consequences is a requisite of informed citizenship and thoughtful action. Maine takes a pass on all of these.

Clarity and Organization: 1/3

While the organization of Maine’s civics standards is unusual, the manner in which the performance expectations for grades K–2 and 3–5 are organized does allow for the identification of basic themes and progressions across these grade levels. However, as noted, there is no equivalent detail for middle or high school (where one would naturally expect to find the outline for some sort of civics and/or U.S. government course). This might be less problematic were it not for the fact that there is so little detail for each grade band, a pattern that leaves the reader with almost no sense of scope.

Strengths & Weaknesses of the Maine Civics Standards

Strengths

1. If nothing else, the expectation that students repeatedly engage in civic action or service learning shows a commitment to community and/or public service.

Weaknesses

1. Maine repeatedly settles for vague phrases (e.g., “structures and processes”) instead of providing concrete details.
2. There is no mention of equal protection or due process in any grade, no reference to elections in high school, and no guidance as to what aspects of the three branches of government, the Bill of Rights, and federalism should be studied.

U.S. History: F

In Brief

Maine’s U.S. History standards consist of little more than vague injunctions to master social studies skills and understand history. Perhaps education leaders in the Pine Tree State are confident that their schools and districts need no guidance in this realm and comfortable with the possibility that students will emerge from K–12 with no shared exposure to core features of U.S. History.

Content and Rigor: 0/7

K-8

Maine's standards open with an invocation of "great architects of American public education" such as Jefferson, Mann, and Dewey, and their belief that "every student must be well versed in our nation's history." Yet the state seems to believe that actually defining such knowledge is somebody else's job.

Collectively, Maine's history standards consist of just four pages of purely abstract "performance expectations." For example, students in fourth grade are to

Understand various major eras in the history of the community, Maine, and the United States by identifying major historical eras, major enduring themes, turning points, events, consequences, persons, and timeframes in the history of the community, the state, and the United States. (Grade 4, History 1)

Similarly, students in fifth grade are to

Understand various major eras by tracing and explaining how the history of democratic principles is preserved in historic symbols, monuments, and traditions important in the community, Maine, and the United States. (Grade 5, History 1)

In general, middle school brings little change, save that the two vague performance expectations for grades 6–8 are followed by sub-items (classified as "foundational" or "developmental") that again direct students to engage in nebulous activities such as "tracing" and "explaining" so they may fully comprehend "the history of democratic ideals and constitutional principles" in the U.S. and the "major historical eras, major enduring themes, turning points, events, consequences, and people in the history of Maine, the United States, and various regions of the world."

As these examples suggest, there is no hint of grade-specific subject matter. Nor is there the slightest indication of historical substance or outlining, save for an exceptionally brief list of historical eras that appears before the grade band charts, which includes items such as "1844 to 1877: Regional tensions and civil war" and "1890 to 1945: Domestic and global challenges; debate over Government's role and the role of the U.S. in the world."

High School

The history standards for high school are only one page long. According to the first history performance expectation, students are to learn about "historic influences in United States and world history, including the roots of democratic philosophy, ideals, and institutions in the world" by "analyzing and critiquing major historical eras" and "tracing and critiquing the roots and evolution of democratic ideals and constitutional principles in the history of the world using historical sources."

Another specifies that students are also supposed to "understand historical aspects of unity and diversity in the United States, the world, and Native American communities" by, for example, "identifying and critiquing issues characterized by unity and diversity in the history of the United States, and describing their effects" and examining "major turning points and events in the history of Native Americans and various historical and recent immigrant groups in the United States." (We are not told exactly what it means to "critique" historical eras, the roots of democratic ideals, or issues of unity and diversity, but the wording hints of condemning the past for failing to live up to current principles.)

That's it. No sequence, specifics, or guidance of any kind are provided, even at the high school level. The introductory material simply tells "school administrative units" to "develop a coherent curriculum that provides students with a balanced exposure to the major eras of United States and World History"—a task in which the state clearly sees no role

Strengths & Weaknesses of the Maine U.S. History Standards

Strengths

None.

Weaknesses

1. Maine's U.S. History standards lack any meaningful content, leaving districts and teachers without substantive guidance.

for itself, guaranteeing that students in different schools and districts across Maine will have no common exposure to core historical content.

Skills Development

Although specific historical skills are hard to find, a few individual performance expectations do ask students to apply research skills, communicate findings, describe plagiarism, demonstrate citations, and make decisions based on social studies knowledge. Similarly, the introductory material includes references to note-taking, organizing information, creating bibliographies, and evaluating primary and secondary sources.

In addition to these references, the performance expectations also try to articulate skill gradations with directives such as “understand,” “identify,” “explain,” “analyze,” and “trace” (with mixed results).

Skimpy though these skills-oriented instructions are, they amount to a strength in the absence of historical substance and sequence.

Clarity and Organization: 0/3

Although Maine’s chart-based presentation of its standards, performance expectations, and strands is visually cluttered, presentation is of secondary importance when there is so little to present.

No sequence is defined for U.S. History, as no effort is made to assign specific material to any particular grade level or band. Similarly, scope is a mystery—for all practical purposes, there is no specific content.

Recommendations

Civics

1. **Avoid vague or overbroad performance standards** and instead give teachers and districts concrete guidance about what students need to know.
2. **Bolster the treatment of key topics**, including the three branches of government, civil liberties, elections, voting rights, federalism, and the Fourteenth Amendment.

U.S. History

1. **Draft new standards that offer concrete guidance**, with the goal of ensuring that all K–12 students access to a rigorous, and reasonably consistent U.S. History sequence.

Both Subjects

1. **Specifically require that high school students take at least one year of U.S. History and one semester of civics to graduate.**

Documents Reviewed

- “Maine Learning Results for Social Studies,” 2019, <https://www.maine.gov/doe/learning/content/socialstudies/standards>

Civics and U.S. History

Maryland

A	Exemplary	10
	Standards worthy of implementation	9
B	Good	8
	Targeted revisions recommended	7
C	Mediocre	6
	Significant revisions strongly recommended	5
D	Inadequate	4
	Complete revision recommended before implementation	3
F		2
		0-1

Civics: B+

Content & Rigor: 6/7

Clarity & Organization: 2/3

Total Score: 8/10

U.S. History: B

Content & Rigor: 5/7

Clarity & Organization: 2/3

Total Score: 7/10

Overview

Maryland’s civics and U.S. History standards are good. The state is one of a handful to offer two full sequences in U.S. History, and the high school courses in American Government and modern U.S. History are particularly strong. However, cumbersome organization and some thin spots prevent the standards from achieving true excellence. Targeted revisions are recommended.

Description of the Standards

Maryland offers separate PDF documents for grades pre-K–5, for grades 6 and 7 (combined), and for four subject-specific courses: grade 8 U.S. History, high school U.S. History, high school American Government, and high school Modern World History. Every document opens with a list of six overarching standards. However, the actual content in pre-K–3 is divided into four “units”: civics, geography, economics, history. Within each unit, charts provide a series of “content topics,” each supplemented with one or more “essential questions” that are furnished with an “indicator” and “objectives” as well as three columns of skills standards—reading, writing, and speaking and listening—drawn from the ELA standards. “Assessment limits” designate topics that may appear on the state test for grade 8; however, “if topics do not appear in the assessment limits, then students cannot be held accountable for knowing that information.”

In grades 4 and 5, the units become chronological eras in U.S. and Maryland history. The document for grades 6–7 doesn't use the word "unit," and its layout is quite different. Finally, the structure of the four post-grade 7 course outlines is similar to the structure for grades 4 and 5.

Civics: B+

In Brief

Maryland's civics standards have many strong elements, especially in the unusually detailed fifth-grade and high school courses. However, coverage of the Bill of Rights is weak, and some standards could be worded more clearly.

Content and Rigor: 6/7

K-8

Maryland's civics standards for the early grades are unusually substantive and thoughtful. To wit, the big concepts in pre-K and Kindergarten are freedom, equality, compromise, and rules. Voting, civic engagement, and the common good are all emphasized in grades 1–3, and second graders are also expected to distinguish between local, state, and national governments. Grade 3 introduces the "principles" in the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution (though none are specified). It also introduces the three branches of government and asks students to compare the responsibilities of local, state, and national governments. Finally, students are expected to examine "a current issue on the local, state, and national level and its impact on their community" and implement "an informed civic action plan on a current issue" (given the potential for misinterpretation, an example of what that last part looks like when it is done well might be helpful).

Grade 4 begins the first of two passes through U.S. History. However, although it concludes with a pair of standards on the Articles of Confederation, the civics content is scant, given the time period. Far richer content can be found in grade 5, which includes eight objectives that concern the Constitution (with specific references to the separation of powers and checks and balances), four more for the Bill of Rights

(including one that asks for contemporary application), another three that focus specifically on freedom of the press, and three more for civil rights—plus additional objectives that are devoted to the Civil War Amendments and the Supreme Court, respectively. Multiple objectives weigh the ability of the various branches of government to handle big issues, such as foreign policy, domestic order, and individual rights. However, some objectives are vague or poorly worded. For example, one asks students to identify the "scope of powers within branches and levels of government."

According to the standards, students in grades 6 and 7 "shall inquire about the historical development of the fundamental concepts and processes of authority, power, and influence with particular emphasis on civic reasoning in order to become informed, responsible citizens, engage in the political process, and contribute to society." Accordingly, grade 6 (which focuses on ancient civilizations) includes the obligatory references to ancient legal codes, democracy in Greece, the Roman Republic, and *Magna Carta*. Similarly, the standards for grade 7 (which focuses broadly on the modern world) include indicators about comparative government, human rights, international law, and international organizations, as well as political parties, public policy, interest groups, the role of media, and the government's role in the economy. As in previous grades, however, nebulous wording sometimes undermines the generally worthy content in these grades. For example, students in seventh grade are expected to "evaluate ways citizens use, monitor, and influence the formation and implementation of public policy," which could mean almost anything.

Eighth grade begins the second U.S. History survey, covering from colonization to "the dawn of the twentieth century." Accordingly, it covers much of the same ground as fifth grade but in somewhat greater depth. For example, the "principles" the Constitution "embeds" now include "federalism, popular sovereignty, individual rights, and limited government" (though attempting to cover so much important ground in a single bullet point may be unwise). Other objectives specifically reference *Marbury v. Madison*, Lincoln's suspension of habeas corpus, and the Civil War Amendments. Similarly, the "assessment limits" mention Supreme Court cases such as *McCulloch v. Maryland*, *Worcester v. Georgia*, *Dred Scott v. Sandford*, and *Plessy v. Ferguson*, as well as the Alien and Sedition Acts. In addition to the compressed nature of the objectives that deal with the Constitution, one potential concern is the general manner in which the Bill of

Rights is addressed in both fifth grade and eighth grade, which suggests that the specific rights and principles they embody (e.g., due process) may be overlooked by teachers with numerous other demands on their time.

High School

As discussed in greater depth in the U.S. History portion of this review, Maryland’s high school U.S. History course is impressive—and thus a likely source of civic learning. Perhaps most notably, the standards for the course include specific references to no fewer than fifteen Supreme Court cases, including *Brown v. Board of Education*, *Gideon v. Wainwright*, *Loving v. Virginia*, *Roe v. Wade*, *District of Columbia v. Heller*, and *Obergefell v. Hodges*. Although doing justice to all these historic and legal cataclysms while also addressing the rest of U.S. History is sure to test the skill and knowledge of Maryland educators, from a civics perspective, their inclusion can only be commended (though the standards contain notably fewer references to specific acts of Congress).

In general, the standards for Maryland’s American Government course are also commendable. To wit, the Structure and Origins unit, which looks at the historical and philosophical evolution of limited government, analyzes the structure of the U.S. Constitution, including checks and balances, judicial review, federalism, and the amendment process.

Subsequent units helpfully reinforce each other. For example, the unit on the legislative branch alludes to federalism and checks and balances. It also covers elections and political parties with strong details, such as open vs. closed primaries, the role of lobbyists, and campaign finance—plus an indicator about how people can influence legislative bodies (e.g., through referenda, civil disobedience, and voting drives). Similarly, the unit of the executive branch has rich detail, from the presidential nominating process to regulatory agencies and how crises shape the executive branch (although there are a couple of missing items, such as the appointment and pardon powers). Finally, the judicial branch unit offers an indicator with eight significant Supreme Court cases, exploring individual rights, federalism, separation of powers, checks and balances, and equal protection - plus an objective on the Fourteenth Amendment (which includes incorporation) and three strikingly rigorous objectives that cover the essentials of criminal law and civil law.

Three more units on Economic Policy, Domestic Policy, and Foreign Policy naturally loop back to the essential content described above, while also covering a wide range of worthy content. For example, the unit on Economic Policy covers everything from “how traditional, command and market and mixed economies answer the basic economic questions of what to produce, how to produce and for whom to produce when resources are limited” to “the role of state and federal legislative branches in developing fiscal policy.” Similarly, the Domestic Policy unit covers everything from “the voting patterns of various demographic groups” to the basics of public policy, including “how federalism impacts government policies for Education.” Finally, the Foreign Policy unit looks at international organizations and isolationism vs. interventionism, and it contemplates how the United States handles the conflicting demands of trade, national security, and human rights.

Strengths & Weaknesses of the Maryland Civics Standards

Strengths

1. The high school course on American Government course covers most essential content with strong detail.
2. The secondary courses in U.S. History include numerous references to seminal Supreme Court cases.
3. The fifth-grade course provides a solid introduction to many important civics topics.
4. Early grades emphasize the common good and civic engagement.

Weaknesses

1. The Bill of Rights receives unfortunately general coverage at every level.
2. Organization and presentation are cumbersome and inconsistent.

In short, there is much to praise and little to criticize in American Government, with one puzzling exception: As in previous grades, the Bill of Rights is only referenced in a general way in the high school course (though some topics, such as the Second Amendment, are addressed in other standards). Given the depth with which other topics are addressed, this is a noteworthy flaw.

Skills and Dispositions

As noted, compromise, cooperation, and the common good are consistent themes in the early grades. However, after this strong start, Maryland places less emphasis on the development of civic skills and dispositions. The reading, writing, and speaking and listening skills outlined for grades pre-K–5 are sensible, but they don't pertain to civics specifically. Several grades do ask students to write opinion pieces, which could bolster students' advocacy skills (provided they begin by researching whatever they are writing about). However, the civics-specific "skills and processes" outline for grades 6 and 7 is fairly generic, asking students to apply unspecified civic dispositions and skills, identify deliberative processes, and explain the relevance of personal interests when assessing problems in government and civil society. Stronger skills development can be found under the banner of "communicating and critiquing conclusions and taking informed action" (for example, students are asked to construct arguments using multiple perspectives and recognizing counterclaims; understand how a problem can manifest at local, regional, and global levels over time; and assess how individual and collective action can address problems). Finally, the high school course contains numerous expectations that implicitly encourage students to engage with the issues that matter to their communities, although it could be more explicit about the ways in which they might do so.

Clarity and Organization: 2/3

Maryland's social studies documents are generally usable. The nested structure of units, content topics, essential questions, and indicators and objectives is cumbersome but in practice does not deeply interfere with the coherent presentation of content (although the decision to use an entirely different structure for the document for grades 6 and 7 causes needless confusion). In general, content and scope are well defined in the American Government course

but less clear in elementary and middle school, where some standards could be worded more clearly.

U.S. History: B

In Brief

Commendably, Maryland offers a two-year introduction to U.S. History in elementary school, followed by another two-year survey in higher grades. However, content outlining is weak before high school, and organizational weaknesses cause avoidable confusion.

Content and Rigor: 5/7

K–8

In early grades, Maryland's social studies standards focus very broadly on conventional concepts of past, present, and change over time. Grade 3 mentions "early regional culture groups," invoking societies in the Americas, Western Europe, and Western Africa; group settlement in Maryland; how institutions support and restrict freedoms for different groups; and the contrasting lives of "early European explorers, colonists, indentured servants, and enslaved Africans." However, the actual scope of the third-grade content is unclear.

Grade 4 initiates the first of two U.S. History sequences, covering United States and Maryland history from 1450 to 1789. The grade-level outline is divided into three chronological units and their subsidiary content topics, which touch on Native cultures, European exploration and contact, colonial settlements and regions, concepts of freedom in the era, slavery in Maryland, the American Revolution and Maryland's response, and the Articles of Confederation. Unfortunately, the indicators and objectives are mostly brief and broad, without supporting explanation or detail. For example, the roots of European exploration are reduced to "the push/pull factors that led to European exploration and colonization" and "geographic factors that influenced European exploration." The legal establishment of slavery and its wider historical context are noted, but Colonial self-government is not, despite a section

on “Definitions of Freedom.” The French and Indian War, taxation without representation, Shay’s Rebellion, and some aspects of the Declaration of Independence are noted with a hint of detail, but as a content outline the material is thin.

Grade 5 covers (or seeks to cover) the rest of U.S. and Maryland history, from 1780 to the present. Coverage of the Constitutional Convention and Bill of Rights is comparatively strong, but the outline skips over the early Republic, jumping to conflict over slavery and the Civil War (where there are notable gaps). A brief section on the post-Civil War era invokes urbanization, industrialization, and immigration but barely discusses any of them. Most of the third and final unit is devoted to civics content on freedom of speech and political institutions; a broad content topic on civil rights, entirely lacking specifics, is the *only* content offered for the twentieth century.

After grades 6 and 7 turn to world history and civics, grade 8 begins Maryland’s second pass through U.S. History. The course outline opens with a brief “bridge unit” recapitulating 1607–1754 in extremely general terms. Five chronological units and their subsidiary content topics run from 1754 to the post-Civil War era, and another bridge unit, linked to the later high school course, touches on late-nineteenth-century industrialization/expansion. Content coverage is extremely uneven, but the “assessment limits” column provides helpful details that are otherwise absent. Coverage of the Constitution was arguably stronger in grade 5, but the grade 8 course does cover the Early Republic, including specific references to the Washington presidency, the Marshall court, the expansion of slavery, the Jackson presidency, reform movements, and the growing sectional crisis. Combined with the details in the assessment limits, coverage of the period is reasonably strong. Slavery is emphasized as the “central cause” of the Civil War, though coverage of the war era itself is erratic. Finally, coverage of Reconstruction and its aftermath touches on some essentials and is fleshed out by the “assessment limits” column.

High School

Oddly, although grade 8’s brief coverage of post-Civil War industrialization, immigration, and expansion is identified as a “bridge unit” to the high school course, the high school coverage of the same period is also marked as a bridge unit, meaning that neither course covers the period in depth. And because there is no assessment for high school U.S. History,

the “assessment limits” and their additional details are absent.

Fortunately, substantive coverage improves significantly in the five subsequent units that run from 1890 to the present. The labor movement, Populism, Progressivism, and early civil rights efforts appear in the first unit (though with 1877–90 reduced to a short “bridge unit,” immigration and the rise of Jim Crow are shortchanged). WWI and the 1920s are generally solid, with notable items touching on postwar racial tensions, the first Red Scare, immigration restriction, the Klan, the Eugenics movement, and so on. Coverage of the Depression and New Deal is rather rushed, but the section on WWII is stronger. Finally, coverage of postwar life, the Cold War, and the Civil Rights movement is uneven and chronologically jumbled but does include many key

Strengths & Weaknesses of the Maryland U.S. History Standards

Strengths

1. Maryland requires two U.S. History surveys, one in grades 4–5 and the second in eighth grade and high school.
2. The high school U.S. History outline is often impressive, particularly in its emphasis on the frequently overlooked 1970s and 1980s.
3. In general, coverage of the Constitutional Convention, Supreme Court cases, and other civics-relevant topics is strong.

Weaknesses

1. Content outlining is erratic and often thin prior to the high school course.
2. Organization and presentation are cumbersome and inconsistent.
3. The second U.S. History survey gives short shrift to the Colonial period.

points and a fair amount of detail (though with no section directly addressing political issues of the 1960s and early 1970s, Watergate somewhat oddly appears in the section on Vietnam).

Maryland devotes an unusual amount of space and detail to developments after 1974, a period many states barely cover. There is a good degree of detail on public policy and court decisions (especially on civil rights), economic change, and shifts in the Cold War. The rise of the New Right is emphasized and discussed in generally neutral tones. The final unit, which covers from 1992 to the present, discusses conflict over globalization, terrorism, and political polarization (including demographic change, shifts in minority rights, court decisions, gun control, and other wedge issues).

In short, the high school outline has significant strengths. If the early grade-level outlines were of similar quality, the overall grade for Maryland’s standards would be higher.

Skills Development

Maryland’s focus on history-related skills is strangely erratic. Much of the content in the pre-K–5 documents is devoted to three detailed skills columns derived from the state’s ELA materials. These focus on reading comprehension, composition, and communication, including points such as the internal logic and evidence in texts. However, because they are designed for an ELA context, they don’t specifically address historical skills such as primary and secondary sources, source context, and detecting source purpose and bias (Maryland apparently means to offer additional guidance related to reading and writing in history/social studies standards, but at the time of this review, the links to those documents were inactive). Thus, from a history perspective, the emphasis on skills is something of a waste.

In contrast, the document for grades 6 and 7 includes a separate “skills and processes” content standard (though the documents confusingly suggest that this standard should be present in all grades). And here, the specified skills are divided by strand. Those for history include change over time and causality, analysis of multiple past perspectives, and the context, purpose, and credibility of historical sources (though secondary sources are specifically discussed while primary sources are not).

Finally, the high school U.S. History course does not include direct discussion of skill development.

Clarity and Organization: 2/3

As described in the civics portion of this review, Maryland’s social studies standards documents are usable but unnecessarily convoluted. In particular, the different format in the grades 6 and 7 document framework adds avoidable confusion.

Still, scope and sequence are clearly defined starting in grades 4 and 5, with an introductory survey indicated for grades 4 and 5 and a second survey in grade 8 and high school—though the second survey gives short shrift to the Colonial period.

Recommendations

Civics

1. Ensure that the wording of the K–8 civics standards is clear and specific.
2. Enhance the treatment of the Bill of Rights, especially in the American Government course.

U.S. History

1. Improve substantive content outlining, especially prior to high school, either in the “assessment limits” or elsewhere.

Both subjects

1. Standardize organization and presentation across all social studies materials.
2. Preserve the considerable merits of the current standards.

Documents Reviewed

- Maryland Social Studies Framework; PreKindergarten, Kindergarten, Grade 1, Grade 2, Grade 3, Grade 4, Grade 5 (2020); Grades 6-7 (under review); Grade 8 United States History, High School United States History, American Government (2020); <http://marylandpublicschools.org/about/Pages/DCAA/Social-Studies/MSSS.aspx>

Revisions to the Maryland Social Studies Framework for Grades 6-7 are currently underway.

Massachusetts

A	Exemplary	10
	Standards worthy of implementation	9
B	Good	8
	Targeted revisions recommended	7
C	Mediocre	6
	Significant revisions strongly recommended	5
D	Inadequate	4
	Complete revision recommended before implementation	3
2		
0-1		
F		

Civics: A-

Content & Rigor: 6/7

Clarity & Organization: 3/3

Total Score: 9/10

U.S. History: A-

Content & Rigor: 6/7

Clarity & Organization: 3/3

Total Score: 9/10

Overview

Massachusetts' civics and U.S. History standards are exemplary. Rigorous content and thoughtful sequencing frequently complement clear prose and straightforward organization. However, for some reason, the high school course on U.S. Government and Politics is listed as an elective. Aside from correcting that mistake, we strongly recommend the continued implementation of these standards.

Description of the Standards

Massachusetts' History and Social Science Framework provides content outlines for every grade K-8, for high school courses in United States and World History, and for assorted electives, including "United States Government and Politics." Each grade or course begins with an overview, which includes a "looking back, looking ahead" section linking its standards to a broader social studies progression and a capsule summary of key skills (expanded upon in a separate document, "Vertical Progression of the Standards for History and Social Science Practice, by grade span"). Each grade has a series of major topics, which are further defined by a "supporting question," followed by substantive content standards, often including additional specifics, suggested examples, and "clarification statements." After each

content outline for grades pre-K–5, and in separate sections for grade bands 6–8, 9–10, and 11–12, the framework offers Standards for Literacy in History and Social Studies, focusing on reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills.

Civics: A–

In Brief

Massachusetts’ civics standards are well organized and rich in content. It’s a shame the high school United States Government and Politics course is considered an elective.

Content and Rigor: 6/7

K–8

After conventionally basic coverage of rules, responsibilities, and fairness in pre-K and Kindergarten, Massachusetts has uncommonly substantive civics topics for grade 1, including how groups make decisions, what a leader is, and introductions to elections and citizenship. In contrast, grade 2 has less civics coverage, although it does cover the difference between physical and political geography and the definition of “country.”

The Commonwealth itself is the focus of grade 3, where the standards provide excellent coverage of local government, introduce the Massachusetts Constitution (“the oldest functioning constitution in the world”), and provide a “first building block” look at the Declaration of Independence, the U.S. Constitution, and the Bill of Rights (for example, students are expected to “explain that the rights of citizens are spelled out in the Constitution’s first ten amendments, known as the Bill of Rights” and that “full citizenship rights were restricted to White male property owners over the age of twenty-one in the new Republic”). In grade 4, which is comparatively light on civics, students research either Canada or Mexico (including their governments), the role of Washington, D.C., as the national capital, and how the government has responded to catastrophic natural events.

Grade 5 is a first pass at U.S. History and thus includes civics topics such as colonial government, the Articles

of Confederation, the three branches of government, the various levels of government, major issues at the Constitutional Convention, an introduction to the Reconstruction Amendments, and how civil rights have been expanded over time. Students are asked to research one right in the Bill of Rights, thus ensuring that the inherent breadth of the subject matter is complemented by a sense of its depth.

In general, the elementary grades progress smoothly and logically over essential material with just the right level of detail.

Civics isn’t the primary focus of grades 6 and 7, which cover World History (though democracy in Greece and the Roman Republic are handled well). However, it comes roaring back in grade 8, which is devoted to “United States and Massachusetts Government and Civic Life.” Appropriately, the eighth-grade standards start with a topic on the philosophical foundations of the U.S. government—Greece, Rome, the Enlightenment, the British constitutional tradition, and what the colonists learned from Native Peoples. Next up is the development of the American system of government, from the causes of the Revolution to the Articles of Confederation to the Constitutional Convention to the arguments of the Federalists and Anti-Federalists, which is followed by a topic about institutions of the U.S. government that explores the three branches, federal elections, and political parties.

In addition to the expected content, a subsequent topic on rights and responsibilities includes more sophisticated ideas such as the potential for conflict between liberty and equality. There’s also a truly exceptional topic on the Constitution, its amendments, and key Supreme Court cases (students are asked to research one case in each of three areas—the First Amendment, the Fourteenth Amendment, and the tension between individual rights and national interests—and the outline includes no fewer than seventeen well-chosen examples). Finally, after a fine topic on Massachusetts state and local government (which includes a nice discussion of federalism), the standards cover freedom of press and media literacy with notable clarity of purpose.

If anything is missing from this otherwise exemplary set of standards, it is a clear and explicit examination of the rule of law.

High School

After the impressive treatment of civics in grade 8, it's a disappointment to see that there is no required high school civics course (though Massachusetts' grade for civics does not reflect this decision). Of course, the U.S. History course naturally covers some relevant material, including the Constitutional Convention, assessments of key presidencies, opportunities to research federal legislation and major social/political movements, a relatively brief look at the Reconstruction Amendments, a few major Supreme Court cases, and the role of the government in the economy. Similarly, the World History course has a unit on the philosophies of government and society, which explores Enlightenment philosophy and the British Constitution. Yet even a strong U.S. History sequence is no substitute for a *bona fide* high school civics course such as "United States Government and Politics," which is currently listed as an elective.

As the title suggests, the United States Government and Politics course reviews and expands on information imparted by the grade 8 course and the high school U.S. History course. Specifically, it reviews the branches of government and their interrelationships in much greater depth and takes another look at big-picture concepts such as pluralism, natural rights, and the social contract. It also covers modern political parties in considerable detail and explores interest groups, the media, and the creation of public policy—a topic not directly addressed in the eighth-grade course. Finally, the relationship between the United States and other nations is at last explored through a civics lens with the detail it deserves. However, the role of the government in the economy is documented in the elective Economics course, not here.

The course isn't perfect. For example, federalism is mentioned several times but never as a standalone topic, and one topic on civil rights, human rights, and civil liberties is uncharacteristically scant and directionless (although it does ask students to research two Supreme Court decisions, it would be better to ensure that the First, Fourth, Sixth, and Fourteenth Amendments receive proper coverage). Notably, although many states' high school civics courses include a standard on the rights and responsibilities of citizens and/or a section about how people can influence government, Massachusetts does not. Perhaps the thinking is that this

topic is dealt with satisfactorily in grade 8, but a targeted reminder of the roles and responsibilities of citizens would still be welcome. Finally, there is very little comparative government, without which students' perspective on the strengths, weaknesses, and foibles of the U.S. system will necessarily be limited.

Arguably, the strongest feature of the Government and Politics course is the expectation that students will conduct at least three research projects—one on a public policy that is impacting the local community, one on a significant world political issue, and one on whether and how the Constitution is relevant in the twenty-first century. These excellent exercises are sure to spark students' interest and deepen their understanding, which is why they should be required.

Strengths & Weaknesses of the Massachusetts Civics Standards

Strengths

1. Massachusetts does a great job of sequencing civics content in grades K–8, and the eighth-grade course caps this sequence in an impressive manner.
2. Content guidance is clear and specific, with exactly the right level of detail and ambition.
3. Well-conceived research projects give students opportunities to apply what they have learned, especially in later grades.
4. The standards are very well written.

Weaknesses

1. Massachusetts needs a mandatory, standalone civics course in high school.
2. The elective course in "United States Government and Politics" doesn't pay enough attention to federalism, amendments to the Constitution, or comparative government.

Skills and Dispositions¹

For each elementary grade and for the 6–9, 9–10, and 11–12 grade bands, Massachusetts has Literacy Standards for History and Social Science. Elementary skills expectations that are relevant to civics include writing opinion pieces and engaging in collaborative discussions. For middle school, they include identifying an author’s point of view, distinguishing fact from opinion, acknowledging opposing claims, assessing the credibility of sources, and delineating a speaker’s argument and specific claims. In high school, students learn to develop counterclaims, respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives, and assess the strengths and weaknesses of sources.

In addition to these explicit skills standards, the content standards for many grades also include one or more research projects that are (as noted) extremely well conceived and likely to cultivate many skills that are relevant to citizenship. Furthermore, the state asks students in grade 8 and high school to participate in a significant, action-oriented civics project (projects are broken into six phases, each of which emphasizes different skills). Finally, the standards for the earliest grades cover notions of fairness and responsibility, and the third- and eighth-grade standards cover the rights and responsibilities of citizenship in good detail.

Clarity and Organization: 3/3

The Massachusetts standards document has a straightforward format—a brief introduction for each course, followed by topics and content standards—that is mercifully free of “strands” and therefore easy to follow. The language is clear and direct. There is no visual clutter. Sequencing is logical, and content (with a few exceptions like the high school topic on civil rights and civil liberties) has the right level of detail and ambition.

U.S. History: A-

In Brief

Massachusetts’s U.S. History standards are exemplary, with an impressive emphasis on America’s founding principles and Americans’ long struggle to make those principles a reality.

Content and Rigor: 6/7

K-8

Massachusetts gets off on the right foot with a social studies mission statement that envisions shared knowledge of “the fundamental ideas central to the vision of the eighteenth-century founders, the vision that holds us together as one people,” as well as “the intellectual and political tensions and compromises in the Founders’ ideas and how successive generations in the United States have worked to resolve them.”

Kindergarten and grade 1 work outward from classroom to community, focusing on concepts of chronology, unity, and diversity (“*E Pluribus Unum*”), holidays, and national symbols/songs. Grade 2 focuses on migration and immigration (including forced migrations), and grade 3 introduces Massachusetts government and history from Native cultures through European settlement, the Plymouth and Massachusetts Bay colonies, and the Revolution. Specificity and explanatory detail in third grade are notable for the age level, including points such as the wider context of slavery and the rise of trading economies. Finally, grade 4 focuses on North America’s geography and ancient peoples, European exploration, and the development of U.S. regions over time.

Grade 5 begins the main U.S. History sequence, covering from colonization through Civil War and subsequent civil rights battles. In general, the level of detail is solid, though explanatory depth is inconsistent. British colonies and their regional differences are treated quickly but soundly. Considerable space is devoted to the rise and practices of slavery, but discussion jumps chronologically to post-Revolutionary emancipation laws. Colonial self-government is noted in the Revolutionary era as a factor in Colonial

resistance but is missing from the Colonial era (though the English tradition of self-government is mentioned). British tax acts and “no taxation without representation” are cited, but why Americans objected to British taxes and what taxation with representation *meant* are not explained. Too often, the Revolution is reduced to a list of names, but discussions of Loyalism and the ideas behind the Declaration of Independence are notably stronger.

Coverage of the Constitution and Constitutional Convention is solid (though women’s exclusion from the suffrage needs better contextual explanation). Discussion of the 1790s is scanty, but the early presidencies and partisan schism are noted. Early nineteenth-century territorial and economic expansion are covered well, but the reform movements are missing. The antebellum entrenchment of slavery is well explained, but key points such as the centrality of slavery’s expansion to the territories and the nature of free-soil antislavery are not mentioned. Finally, modern civil rights movements are discussed “to make students aware that the movement to extend equality to all has roots in eighteenth-century ideas” and that the foundational documents are relevant to all eras—admirable educational aims.

Overall, the grade 5 course is a solid and age-appropriate introduction to America’s foundations. However, because grades 6 and 7 are devoted to world history and grade 8 to civics, U.S. History as such isn’t revisited until high school, and some topics from the fifth-grade course are never revisited.

High School

The first half of the two-year high school U.S. History sequence, “U.S. History I,” runs from the Revolution to WWI (thus relegating the Colonial period to grade 5).² Detail on the Revolution is sparse (the meaning of “no taxation without representation” is still unexplained) and the Constitutional Convention is only briefly recapitulated, but coverage of the 1790s is stronger. Chronology becomes somewhat jumbled after 1800. For example, the Jackson presidency (but not Jacksonian suffrage, though the topic title includes “democratization”) is covered before territorial expansion from 1800 to 1854, including the establishment of free and slave states in the West. Still, regional economic development, the first industrial revolution, immigration, reentrenchment of Southern slavery, and Northern economic

involvement with the slave system are well covered (though free-soil ideology isn’t sufficiently explained). Social change and the reform movements in the early to mid-nineteenth century are covered in unusual detail, but the sectional schism is rushed. Reconstruction is covered in detail, but discussion of Jim Crow jumps ahead to twentieth-century developments. Post-Civil War industrialism, the labor movement, immigration, social change, and western movement are covered well. A final topic packs in Progressivism, women’s suffrage, African American civil rights efforts, U.S. expansion and imperialism, and the U.S. role in WWI—many details are noted, but the topics would benefit from more space.

U.S. History II opens with an overview of modern economics, before turning to societal trends through the 1920s,³ including the Harlem Renaissance, the changing

Strengths & Weaknesses of the Massachusetts U.S. History Standards

Strengths

1. In general, Massachusetts’s U.S. History standards are rich in content, with numerous references to seminal primary source material.
2. The state’s history-related skills standards are particularly exemplary.
3. The standards are well organized and clearly presented.

Weaknesses

1. The generally strong content outlines are weakened in places by avoidable gaps, rushed coverage, and departures from chronology.
2. The Colonial period is relegated to grade 5, and there is no coverage of basic twentieth-century topics such as World War II until high school.

status of women, the first Red Scare and immigration restrictions, White supremacy and the Klan, the Great Migration, science vs. religion, and eugenics. The causes and consequences of the Depression are discussed in sophisticated detail (invoking the aforementioned section on economics), leading into the New Deal and Depression-era sociocultural trends. Fascism, American isolationism, and U.S. involvement in WWII are mentioned more than explained (though coverage of the home front, and the roles of women and African Americans in particular, is more specific). The roots of Cold War and containment correctly discuss Soviet aggression and expansionism, but chronology again becomes muddled as the outline hurries through the Cold War abroad, including the space race and Vietnam, before looping back to concurrent domestic developments, including the postwar boom and social trends, the Red Scare/McCarthyism, the African American civil rights movement, and the women's, LGBTQ, Native American, worker's, and disability rights movements. A final topic packs in domestic and foreign policy from the 1960s to the present, including specific LBJ and Nixon policies, the welfare state and regulation, Reaganism, the end of the Cold War, technological change, and global terrorism (economic globalization, mentioned in the topic title, is not actually discussed).

In short, the high school courses (i.e., U.S. History I and II) consistently note major topics and often achieve impressive depth. Additional detail in the thinner spots would make them truly exemplary.

Skills Development

The Massachusetts social studies standards heavily and impressively emphasize history-related research and analysis skills. Indeed, “thinking historically” (understanding past perspectives in their original context), analytical reading, and research skills are among the standards’ “Guiding Principles.” Each grade’s introduction includes a capsule summary of core skills, including focused inquiry, gathering data from primary and secondary sources, determining the purpose of sources, distinguishing opinion from fact, and presenting conclusions based on evidence. Moreover, a separate document (“Vertical Progression of the Standards for History and Social Science Practice, by grade span”) expands upon these essential skills, with progressively more sophisticated

application across grade bands. Extensive history and social science literacy standards also accompany each K–5 grade and grade bands 6–8, 9–10, and 11–12, further expanding upon skills in analytical reading and evidence-based writing (again with progressively increasing complexity and rigor). “Appendix B” adds guidance on framing inquiry questions, while “Appendix C” provides guidance on selecting and using primary sources. Finally, primary sources are directly invoked throughout the history standards, and students are directed to research and present on selected aspects of various important topics throughout the U.S. History sequence.

Clarity and Organization: 3/3

Massachusetts’s U.S. History standards are admirably clear and well organized. In addition to specifying required content for each grade or course in a user-friendly format, they are mercifully free of jargon. Scope and sequence are clearly and explicitly defined in the introduction and are also evident from the grade-level and course outlines.

The sequence itself isn’t perfect, as the Colonial period is covered solely in grade 5 and most twentieth-century content isn’t covered until high school. Still, Massachusetts does provide an overview of America’s foundational history in primary grades and an extensive two-year survey at the high school level.

Alas, the state doesn’t specifically require that high school students take a U.S. History course to graduate (although many districts do have such a requirement).

Recommendations

Civics

1. **Make the course on U.S. Government and Politics a required course.**
2. **Boost the coverage of comparative politics, federalism, and the most important amendments** (e.g., the First, Fourth, Sixth, and Fourteenth amendments).
3. **Add a standard on the rule of law to the eighth-grade Civics course.**

U.S. History

1. **Offer a fuller introduction to United States history in elementary school.**
2. **Improve detail and chronological presentation where needed.**

Both subjects

1. **Preserve the considerable merits of the current standards in any future revisions.**

Documents Reviewed

- “History and Social Science Framework,” 2018, <https://www.doe.mass.edu/frameworks/hss/2018-12.pdf>
- “Vertical Progression of the Standards for History and Social Science Practice,” 2018, <https://www.doe.mass.edu/instruction/hss.html>
- “Civics Project Guidebook,” updated 2020, <https://www.doe.mass.edu/instruction/hss.html>

ENDNOTES

1. The “Standards for History and Social Science Practice, Pre-K–12” included in the introduction to each grade/course also includes civic knowledge and dispositions and informed action. This content is further elaborated upon in the separate “Vertical Progression of the Standards for History and Social Science Practice, by grade span.”
2. The document says the course should extend students’ knowledge from the late seventeenth century to the present, but nothing before the French and Indian War is mentioned in the outline.
3. The text confusingly refers to the “first two decades of the 20th century” while the content mostly refers to the 1920s (the century’s third decade).

Michigan

A	Exemplary	10
	Standards worthy of implementation	9
B	Good	8
	Targeted revisions recommended	7
C	Mediocre	6
	Significant revisions strongly recommended	5
D	Inadequate	4
	Complete revision recommended before implementation	3
2		
0-1		

Civics: B

Content & Rigor: 5/7

Clarity & Organization: 2/3

Total Score: 7/10

U.S. History: B

Content & Rigor: 5/7

Clarity & Organization: 2/3

Total Score: 7/10

Overview

Michigan's civics and U.S. History standards are good. A great deal of thoughtful and worthy content is undermined by some organizational issues, particularly the sequencing in U.S. History. Targeted revisions are recommended.

Description of the Standards

Michigan's standards are divided into four grade bands (K-2, 3-5, 6-8, and 9-12), each with an overview followed by separate sections for skills and content. The skills sections include an "Arc of Inquiry" and "Social Studies Process and Skills Standards." The content is presented afterwards, with each grade band subdivided into standards for each individual grade for grades K-8 and subject-specific courses in high school. Content in the lower grades is organized into strands, while the high school content is organized into courses, which are subdivided into "standard categories" that cover a topic or historical era, followed by more specific "expectations." These are often—but not always—followed by even more specific example content.

Civics: B

In Brief

A few relatively simple changes would make Michigan’s generally thoughtful and demanding civics standards truly excellent.

Content and Rigor: 5/7

K–8

Michigan’s worthy approach to civics and high expectations are immediately apparent from the standards for early grades. The K–2 standards cover necessary foundations such as the need for rules, individual and personal responsibility, and fairness, equality, and justice. But they also push students’ thinking with less typical requests. For example, first graders are expected to “explain why people create governments” and “give examples of the use of power with authority and power without authority in school,” while second graders are expected to distinguish between personal and civic responsibility.

Third grade begins with an age-appropriate introduction to Michigan’s government, including the expectation that students distinguish between the roles of tribal, state, and local governments. The introductory statement for grade 4 erroneously refers to the structure and functions of Michigan’s government, as the standards pertain to the national government. However, fourth graders are introduced to key concepts such as popular sovereignty, the rule of law, checks and balances, separation of powers, and individual rights. Students are also asked how the Constitution, Bill of Rights, and democratic values are involved in everyday situations. The fourth-grade content is strong but could be improved by adding a standard about how the federal government makes and enforces laws.

Fifth grade, which is devoted to colonial history in the U.S., provides many opportunities for civic learning. For instance, the standard in which students are asked to describe colonial experiences with self-government recommends example content including natural rights, limited government, and representative government (5–U3.1.7). Commendably,

federalism receives its own standard (“describe the principle of federalism and how it is expressed through the sharing and distribution of power as stated in the Constitution”). However, one notable weakness is the catch-all standard that covers the entire Bill of Rights (5–U3.3.8). Highlighting a few key rights would be a better approach in the elementary grades.

“World geography” is the overarching theme for grade 6 social studies and includes civics content relative to various forms of government, international treaties, and international organizations. Commendably, Michigan often encourages its students to engage in comparative and critical thinking. For example, under a standard about comparing and contrasting the purpose of governments, students are encouraged to consider governments in nation states, newly independent states, emerging states, and tribal governments. However, the seventh-grade world history and geography standards could integrate more civics content, especially pertaining to the Roman republic. Although the standards do on several occasions reference legal codes—for example, the Code of Hammurabi, the Ten Commandments, the Tang Code, the Roman Justinian Code, and Mayan codices—these aren’t explicitly tied to the evolution of the rule of law.

In contrast, the eighth-grade “integrated U.S. History standards” do a good job of highlighting civics material. For example, the standard on the Declaration of Independence serves as a springboard for describing colonists’ views on government and their reasons for separating from Great Britain, and another impressive standard asks students to describe the “philosophical origins of constitutional government in the United States” with an emphasis on numerous ideals, including “social contract, limited government, natural rights, right of revolution, separation of powers, bicameralism, republicanism, and popular participation in government” (8–U3.3.7). Other discrete standards that cover treaties, early political parties, *Marbury v. Madison*, the Lincoln presidency, and the Civil War Amendments should, if handled properly, provide extremely strong civics lessons. However, because eighth-grade history ends in 1900, modern civics content is missing.

High School

Overall, Michigan’s framework for high school civics is solid. Its primary flaw is that some standards are followed by

clarifying examples and some are not, although the quality of the examples that are provided is also uneven.

The standards begin with strong coverage of the philosophical and historical underpinnings of American government. For example, one standard (C-1.1.2) asks students to provide examples of and distinguish between different systems of government (though it would be even more helpful if it included specific historical or country examples), while another (C-2.1.1) addresses the “origins of the American Constitutional Government” and offers a range of influential documents worthy of study, from Aristotle’s *Politics* to the Mayflower Compact. And some standards are particularly relevant and thoughtful, such as the one under “Democratic Values and U.S. Constitutional Principles” that asks students to “use examples to investigate why people may agree on Democratic Values and Constitutional Principles in the abstract yet disagree over their meaning when they are applied to specific situations” (C-2.2.3).

Commendably, each branch of the federal government receives at least one stand-alone standard. However, the examples associated with these standards mainly recite powers listed in the Constitution instead of offering illustrative case studies. For example, a comprehensive standard about understanding the purposes, organization, powers, processes, and election of the legislative branch has as its examples “advise and consent, impeachment, power of the purse, approval of treaties, and war powers” (C-3.1.1). Suggesting specific historical episodes, statutes, and Supreme Court cases would raise the bar and likely clarify concepts for students.

Many examples are thoughtful. For instance, a standard on the First Amendment includes more than a dozen well-chosen cases. Yet strangely, some standards don’t have any examples. To wit, one sensible but example-less standard asks students to “explain the significance of campaigns and elections in American politics, current criticisms of campaigns, and proposals for their reform” (C-3.3.4). Imagine how much adding an example like *Citizens United v. FEC* would improve this standard!

Notably, foreign affairs receives its own standard category, although the quality of the examples varies, with some naming specific international organizations and agreements and others referring only to “post-Cold War policy” and “modern treaties.” The high school economics course also has

good, multifaceted coverage of the role of government in the U.S. economy.

Finally, a few big-picture content areas are missing from the high school standards, including how laws are made, the primary system, the Supremacy Clause, and the evolution of the three branches of government. These items could easily be integrated into the existing standards.

Skills and Dispositions

Michigan takes skills and dispositions seriously, as demonstrated by the decision to preface each grade band with “Social Studies Skills and Process Standards,” which include standards on “public discourse and decision making” and “civic participation.” In grades K–8, these expectations ask students to identify and analyze public policy issues,

Strengths & Weaknesses of the Michigan Civics Standards

Strengths

1. The standards are often rich in content, particularly if the best examples are included.
2. The development of skills and dispositions is strong at every grade level.
3. Numerous standards ask students to apply their knowledge to meaningful philosophical and policy questions.
4. The civics sequence is strong for grades K–4, and civics is well integrated into the fifth- and eighth-grade U.S. History courses.

Weaknesses

1. The quality of the examples is uneven.
2. There are a few specific gaps, including how laws are made, the primary system, the Supremacy Clause, and the evolution of the three branches of government.

communicate a reasoned position, and act constructively to further the public good. In high school, numerous standards and examples discuss dispositions such as civility, open-mindedness, and tolerance for ambiguity, as well as skills such as analyzing sources for emotional appeal, logical fallacies, unstated assumptions, and appeals to bias.

Each year, it is expected that students will participate in exercises related to public discourse and civic participation while demonstrating increasingly sophisticated reasoning, including analyzing various points of view, weighing ethical considerations, and considering alternatives.

Clarity and Organization: 2/3

The content outlines are straightforward, displaying expectations and subexpectations, along with examples, in a reasonably intuitive format. However, the introductory and supporting materials—such as the grade-band introductions, Arcs of Inquiry, and process and skills standards—are cumbersome, repetitious, and needlessly confusing. Although much of this material is worthwhile, it can overwhelm the core content (although the problem mainly affects the overviews and skills sections).

U.S. History: B

In Brief

Michigan’s history content standards often approach excellence but are undermined by uneven depth, a flawed sequence, and needlessly complicated presentation.

Content and Rigor: 5/7

K–8

In the early grades, the history strand focuses on conventional themes such as chronology, family and local history, and U.S. holidays. Grades 3 and 4 focus more specifically on Michigan history. And grade 5 begins the main U.S. History sequence, seeking to cover everything from indigenous peoples and European exploration to the Constitution.

The content outline for grade 5 is reasonably thorough, though the level of specificity varies. For example, one exemplary item on the southern colonies requires that students note “the development of one-crop economies (plantation land use and growing season for rice in Carolinas and tobacco in Virginia)” (5-U2.1.1), while another asks them to “describe how the French and Indian War affected British policy toward the colonies and subsequent colonial dissatisfaction with the new policy” (5-U3.1.1) but fails to identify said policy (chiefly taxation). Other standards are unhelpfully broad. For example, one standard asks students to “explain the economic, political, cultural, and religious causes of migration to colonial North America” (5-U2.1.5). Still, the grade 5 content outline does touch on most key issues, including regional differences among the colonies, the rise of both slavery and representative government, the French and Indian War, the American Revolution, Articles of Confederation, the Constitutional Convention, and the Bill of Rights.

After two years of geography and world history, the grade 8 U.S. History course briefly recaps the Revolutionary era before returning to the Constitution and the century plus of growth and conflict that followed its ratification. The explanatory depth is notably stronger than in grade 5. For example, one substandard on creating new government(s) and a new Constitution suggests that students “explain how the Bill of Rights reflected the concept of limited government, protection of basic freedoms, and the fear among many Americans of a strong central government” (8-U.3.3.6). However, this greater sophistication (while clearly age appropriate) also highlights the problem caused by relegating the colonial period to grade 5 only.

Detail is rather weak for the early Republic but increases for the reform movements and sectional tensions (though a reference to “changes in the party system” [8-U5.1.4] doesn’t do justice to the emergence of the Republican party). A standard tracing sectional conflicts back to disputes at the Constitutional Convention is far more impressive (8-U5.1.6). And coverage of Reconstruction—including references to the Freedmen’s Bureau, Black Codes, Reconstruction Amendments, and more—is solid (8-U5.3). Finally, coverage of the later nineteenth century is basic, but the period is more fully revisited in high school.

High School

The high school U.S. History course begins with a brief review of the first one hundred years of nationhood before providing a fuller treatment of events in the past one-hundred and fifty years. The Second Industrial Revolution, the labor movement, urbanization, and Populism are all covered satisfactorily, although immigration and westward expansion are shortchanged and developments during the era are somewhat jumbled chronologically. The rise of segregation and *Plessy v. Ferguson* are noted, though direct references to Jim Crow and sharecropping would add depth. America's rise to world power is rushed (students are to invoke "relevant examples" of expansion and conflict [USHG-6.2.1], but the Spanish-American War is never mentioned). On the other hand, some specific details, such as the Sedition Act, Red Scare, and Palmer Raids are commendable. Finally, Progressivism is covered reasonably well, but is oddly placed after World War I—and the NAACP shouldn't be lumped in with Progressive reform drives, given Progressivism's serious blind spot on race.

Detail remains generally solid and often impressive through the 1920s, the Great Depression, Hoover's response, the New Deal (including rarely mentioned points such as the Supreme Court's role), and World War II. However, thematic organization somewhat jumbles postwar chronology, and the 1970s receive very short shrift. Likewise, the final era, running roughly from the 1980s to the present, is extraordinarily rushed. Reagan and the "growth of the conservative movement in national politics" are mentioned (USHG-9.1.2) but with hardly any detail. Post-Cold War foreign challenges receive a bit more substance. But the single expectation in the final standard on "Policy Debates" shades into a current-events exercise, simply directing students to persuasively argue "on a public policy issue," using "evidence from historical antecedents and precedents, and Democratic Values or Constitutional Principles" (USHG-9.3.1). Though such an exercise has value from a civics perspective, it is no substitute for historical coverage.

On balance, the high school course is strong, despite a few gaps and organizational weaknesses. Still, it is problematic that only the post-Reconstruction period receives high-school-level coverage—and that the crucial colonial period is entrusted entirely to fifth grade.

Skills Development

The Michigan standards present skills (based on the four dimensions of the C3 Framework) in separate sections prefacing the various grade bands and each high school course, including the "Arc of Inquiry" and the "Social Studies Process and Skills Standards." In grades K-8, each grade outline also ends with a skills-oriented "Public Discourse, Decision Making, and Civic Participation" strand.

In general, history-related skills are broad, focusing on overarching aims such as finding evidence and articulating arguments. However, students are specifically expected to distinguish primary and secondary sources, even in the K-2 band—a skill also invoked in various history strands and course outlines. In higher grades, they are also expected to perform more sophisticated analysis, such as evaluating the credibility of a source, explaining the limitations of claims, and sorting conflicting expert interpretations.

Strengths & Weaknesses of the Michigan U.S. History Standards

Strengths

1. U.S. History content coverage is generally solid and sometimes excellent.
2. Scope and sequence are clearly defined.
3. Individual standards are generally well written.

Weaknesses

1. The U.S. History sequence is flawed, relegating the foundational colonial period to grade 5.
2. Skills guidance is difficult to extract from the overly complex and overlapping supporting sections.

Clarity and Organization: 2/3

As noted under the Civics review, Michigan’s content outlines are generally clear and usable, despite the confusing tangle of introductory and skills-based sections. Commendably, the introductory material distinctly defines a U.S. History sequence (despite its flawed decision to relegate the colonial period to grade 5 only) and, unlike many other states, clearly indicates which high school courses are required. Scope is also explicitly defined throughout the U.S. History sequence.

These points of clarity offset some of the confusion introduced by the less-critical supporting sections, which tend to be more complex and repetitive than they should be. For example, it’s not readily apparent why both the Arc of Inquiry and skills and processes are needed, as they each address skills.

Documents Reviewed

- “Michigan K–12 Standards: Social Studies,” 2019, https://www.michigan.gov/documents/mde/Final_Social_Studies_Standards_Document_655968_7.pdf

Recommendations

Civics

1. **Ensure that each standard is accompanied by specific examples.**
2. **Plug the holes in the high school course** (e.g., by adding standards that address how laws are made, the primary system, and the evolution of the three branches of government).

U.S. History

1. **Address the occasional lack of detail** so that all material receives the depth of coverage that much of it already receives.
2. **Offer two full passes through U.S. History** (one in elementary school and a second in higher grades).

Both Subjects

1. **Simplify the cumbersome introductory and skills-based sections to avoid needless confusion.**

Minnesota

A	Exemplary	10
	Standards worthy of implementation	9
B	Good	8
	Targeted revisions recommended	7
C	Mediocre	6
	Significant revisions strongly recommended	5
D	Inadequate	4
	Complete revision recommended before implementation	3
2		
0-1		
F		

Civics: B-

Content & Rigor: 5/7

Clarity & Organization: 2/3

Total Score: 7/10

U.S. History: B-

Content & Rigor: 5/7

Clarity & Organization: 2/3

Total Score: 7/10

Overview

Minnesota’s civics and U.S. History standards are good. However, although they do provide general coverage, the treatment can be superficial, providing little real guidance for educators and other stakeholders. Targeted revisions are recommended.

Description of the Standards

Minnesota provides social studies content outlines for individual grades K–8 and for subject-specific high school courses, including a half-credit Citizenship and Government course and a one-credit U.S. History course (both of which are required for graduation). The grade K–4 outlines are divided into four strands—citizenship and government, economics, geography, and history—that are subdivided into fixed sets of “substrands” and “standards,” which are accompanied by grade-specific “benchmarks.” Grades 5–8 are structured identically except that one strand, that grade’s “lead discipline,” receives the most space. Similarly, each high school course centers on a single, subject-appropriate strand. Although Minnesota’s social studies website states that “students in grades 6–12 must also complete the Literacy in History/Social Studies Standards” that appear as part of the state’s ELA standards, this requirement is not mentioned in the social studies standards document.

Civics: B-

In Brief

Minnesota covers the basics of civics, but many benchmarks lack crucial details.

Content and Rigor: 5/7

K–8

In early grades, Minnesota emphasizes civic participation, stressing voting in grades 1 and 2 and how individuals can take action and make a difference in grades 3 and 4. There is also a gentle introduction to the mechanics of government: the presidency in grade 1, the importance of constitutions in grade 2, the three branches of government in grade 3, and tribal government and the roles of leaders in community, state, and national governments in grade 4. All of this is useful, and one benchmark in grade 3 that explains the importance of civic discourse and the principles of majority rule and minority rights is particularly worthy of praise. Still, each K–4 grade has only three or four civics benchmarks, most of which are broad and basic.

Things pick up a bit in grade 5, with more benchmarks and more sophisticated concepts. The three branches of government receive a necessary second pass. The principles of checks and balances, separation of powers, and federalism are all introduced (though a benchmark that explicitly tackles how an idea becomes a law would be a welcome addition). A benchmark for the Bill of Rights does a reasonable job of covering a lot of ground in an age-appropriate way, and another benchmark emphasizes the principle of limited government. Finally, grade 5's history strand covers how the principles of democracy were set out in the Declaration of Independence, Constitution, and Bill of Rights, as well as the successes and failures of the Articles of Confederation and the major debates at the Constitutional Convention. Based on the suggested examples that accompany these history benchmarks, it appears that they will pack in plenty of civics content.

The standards for grades 6 and 7, which cover “Minnesota Studies” and United States history from 1800 to the present,

dive more deeply into civics. Specifically, grade 6 covers the expansion of rights (e.g., in *Brown v. Board of Education*), the naturalization process, how laws are created (and examples of local, state, and federal laws), the distinction between criminal and civil law, tribal government, the Minnesota Constitution, the state's juvenile justice system, and the “basic structures, functions and ways of funding state and local governments” (6.1.4.6.7). The three branches of government and federalism also receive a third pass.

Topics in grade 7 include how the Constitution and Bill of Rights protect individual and minority rights, key amendments (though none is identified), landmark Supreme Court decisions (e.g., *Tinker v. Des Moines*, *Mapp v. Ohio*, and *Miranda v. Arizona*), how elections have changed over time (e.g., the Fifteenth, Seventeenth, and Nineteenth Amendments; the Voting Rights Act of 1965; and redistricting), foreign policy, and examples of checks and balances throughout history (e.g., Johnson's impeachment, Roosevelt's court-packing plan, and the War Powers Resolution). Commendably, students are also asked to “compare and contrast the rights and responsibilities of citizens, noncitizens, and dual citizens” (7.1.3.5.2). However, given the U.S. History focus of these years, a standard about the role of political parties in either sixth or seventh grade would be a welcome addition.

Compared to the civics standards for previous grades, those for grade 8 are disappointing, covering membership in international organizations and (perhaps too neutrally) “how different types of governments reflect historically and culturally specific understandings of the relationships between the individual, government, and society” (8.1.5.12.1). Given the focus on international relations and other political cultures, eighth grade would be a great place to introduce comparative government—for example, by comparing constitutional and nonconstitutional, presidential and parliamentary, and confederate, unitary, and federal systems.

High School

Compared to the state's generally solid K–8 sequence, Minnesota's high school standards are something of a disappointment. For example, one cosmic benchmark suggests that students “analyze how constitutionalism preserves fundamental societal values, protects individual

freedoms and rights, promotes the general welfare, and responds to changing circumstances and beliefs by defining and limiting the powers of government” (9.1.2.3.1). Similarly, a benchmark on “foundational ideas” mentions “natural rights philosophy, social contract, civic virtue, popular sovereignty, constitutionalism, representative democracy, political factions, federalism and individual rights” (9.1.2.3.3). These are all essential concepts, but they cannot be treated seriously when they appear in such a laundry list. Furthermore, many otherwise well-crafted benchmarks lack depth. To wit, there are no examples whatsoever for the benchmarks covering the Bill of Rights and the Fourteenth Amendment—no famous or infamous Supreme Court cases or acts of Congress. Nor are there any examples of the “procedures involved in voting” or the “powers and operations” of local government in the benchmarks that address those topics.

In general, Minnesota does best when the benchmarks do include examples, such as the lists of individuals’ responsibilities and duties in a republic and international organizations that appear in the benchmarks devoted to those subjects. The state also deserves credit for giving each branch of government its own benchmark, even if the benchmarks in question are too general, and for separating the First Amendment from amendments that deal with the “rights of the accused.” It also does well by including discrete benchmarks for other big ideas including federalism, the naturalization process, the budget process, elections, political parties, tribal sovereignty, comparative government, diplomacy, and international law. This is the right approach, although some of these topics also deserve deeper treatment.

In short, Minnesota has flagged most of the right content, but to get from good to great it needs more specific detail—carefully chosen Supreme Court cases for the judicial branch and Bill of Rights benchmarks; more secondary topics like voter access, campaign finance, and redistricting in the election benchmark; references to parliamentary, unitary, and confederate systems in the comparative government benchmark; and a detailed account of the most important powers (not “purposes”), institutions, and processes for each of the three branches of government.

Skills and Dispositions

In general, Minnesota does a good job of cultivating the skills and dispositions that are essential to citizenship (typically, though not always, in the strand devoted to “civic skills”). For example, the benchmarks for grade 5 encourage the creation of a solution to a public problem after considering it from multiple viewpoints, while sixth graders are expected to evaluate arguments “from diverse perspectives” (6.1.1.1.1) and “address a state or local policy issue” (6.1.1.1.2). In seventh and eighth grade, there are welcome calls to demonstrate “respect for the opinions of people or groups who have different perspectives” (7.1.1.1.1 and 8.1.1.1.1). Finally, the high school standards include references to practical skills such as how to register to vote, evaluate candidates, and cast a ballot—plus a rather general expectation that students “evaluate sources of information and various forms of political persuasion for validity, accuracy, ideology, emotional appeals, bias and prejudice” (benchmark 9.1.1.1.3).

Strengths & Weaknesses of the Minnesota Civics Standards

Strengths

1. In general, the K–8 civics sequence is thoughtful.
2. The standards cultivate skills and dispositions that are essential to informed citizenship.
3. Most individual standards are clearly worded.

Weaknesses

1. Many individual standards need more specific details or examples, especially in high school.
2. There are too many organizational layers.

Clarity and Organization: 2/3

Minnesota’s standards document is visually accessible and generally user-friendly. The introductory material does a reasonable job of explaining the structure without getting bogged down in dizzying charts or diagrams. The grade-level introductions are useful and to the point, and the individual standards (while sometimes broader than one would like) are quite well written. Despite the general dearth of specific course requirements in state law, the high school standards are sensibly organized by course. Still, Minnesota’s approach to organization is rather rigid, and the nested organization of strands, substrands, standards, and benchmarks is somewhat cumbersome. It’s odd, though, not to mention the separate (and apparently *required*) Literacy in History/Social Studies Standards within the social studies standards document itself.

U.S. History: B-

In Brief

Commendably, Minnesota requires two full U.S. History surveys—the first in grades 5 and 7 and the second in high school. However, although they touch on many key issues, the associated content outlines are rushed, with little detail or explanation.

Content and Rigor: 5/7

K–8

Grades K–3 are collectively dedicated to “Foundations of Social Studies,” with no strand emphasized over the others (and thus no specific history). Kindergarten and first grade focus conventionally on community, patriotic symbols, concepts of past and present, change over time, and historical documents. Grade 2 mentions Native American peoples. Grade 3 begins to work on world history. Finally, grade 4 focuses on North American geography, with some focus on historical trends such as population movement and environmental impact but no history as such.

Grade 5 begins the first U.S. History sequence and covers basic content through the Revolution. The civics strand lists some important individuals of the Revolutionary era and protections in the Bill of Rights. The geography strand mentions land use in the North American colonies. However, most of the history content appears in the history strand (the grade’s “lead discipline”).

Discussion of indigenous cultures is brief, with few examples listed. Coverage of the Colonial era mentions motives for European exploration and rivalries, impact on indigenous peoples, slavery and the slave trade, and “local government,” again with few specifics. Discussion of colonial self-government only appears later, with the Revolutionary era, and the Revolution itself is largely reduced to a bare (though reasonably good) list of events. The Declaration of Independence, the weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation (no examples), and important debates at the Constitutional Convention are noted.

After a fairly detailed “Minnesota Studies” course in grade 6, the standards return to “United States Studies (1800 to present)” in grade 7. The civics strand mentions a few notable Supreme Court decisions and political battles, but the bulk of the U.S. History content again appears in the history strand. The history benchmarks are somewhat more specific and detailed than in grade 5 but still lack depth. Although the benchmarks provide reasonable coverage of territorial and technological expansion, as well as antebellum reform movements, coverage of the debate over slavery, Civil War, and Reconstruction is very brief and shallow. Substantially more detail is provided for 1870–1920 industrialization and politics, including immigration, political reform, various forms of prejudice and segregation, women’s suffrage, and WWI. However, the 1920s are skipped as the outline moves straight to the Depression, New Deal, and WWII. The Cold War is correctly framed within efforts “to resist the spread of communism,” with McCarthyism and the blacklist also noted. Yet, as in other states, chronology becomes somewhat jumbled in the latter half of the twentieth century. The outline jumps to global issues of the 1970s and 1980s before discussing post-WWII society. Coverage of welfare state measures and the civil rights movement are rushed. A final 1980-to-the-present standard has only two benchmarks, broadly addressing change in technology and global ties. Domestic events of the 1970s and 1980s barely appear at all.

High School

Although the high school standards make another full pass through U.S. History, from precontact cultures to the present, they add little depth. Coverage of indigenous cultures is brief and generic. The Colonial period touches on motives for exploration and settlement, the Atlantic slave trade, impact on Native Americans, and regional economic patterns in the British colonies (though none are specified). Representative government in the colonies is noted, together with compressed points on changing ethnic and religious patterns. However, coverage of the Revolution itself was actually better in grade 5, where there was at least a fairly comprehensive list of key events (the high school directive to “analyze the American revolutionaries’ justifications, principles, and ideals” and the impact thereof, for example, doesn’t actually explain anything (9.4.4.17.2). Finally, all political developments between 1783 and the 1800 election (including the Constitution) are jammed into a single benchmark.

Six more benchmarks cover the entire period to the 1850s, with technological change, territorial expansion, reform movements, and slavery all crammed together with sporadic detail and little sense of chronology. A single benchmark on political developments from the Federalists to Free Soil only mentions universal White male suffrage *after* the emergence of the Republican party and fails to connect it to Jackson. The benchmark on territorial expansion mentions Native Americans but not their forced removal. The 1850–77 section notes the antebellum sectional schism in broad terms but never mentions the key issue of slavery in the territories or any specific events. In fact, the standard for this section lists slavery *after* economic division as a cause of secession, and Civil War and Reconstruction are again painted with a very broad brush.

Coverage of the final third of American history is similar to coverage of the first two thirds. Industrialization, immigration, changes to Indian policy, Chinese exclusion, and the rise of Jim Crow receive some substantive explanation but little detail. Progressivism and U.S. global expansion are mentioned without much substance. The 1920s, Depression, New Deal, and WWII are barely given more than passing mentions. Coverage of the Cold War is a bit more specific. The Civil Rights movement gets three benchmarks, but all are very general. Finally, the outline charges through to the

end of the Cold War, barely noticing the 1970s and 1980s, and ends with broad invocations of recent immigration, technological innovation, and globalization.

In short, the high school U.S. History standards mention many key issues in American history but rarely do more than that.

Skills Development

History-related skills are addressed in the first two history substrands, principally under “Historical Thinking Skills” and, to a lesser degree, under “Peoples, Cultures and Change Over Time.” Benchmarks for early grades focus on making timelines, calendars, etc., and identifying basic types of historical sources. By grade 5, students are expected to pose questions about a historical topic, examine a variety of sources, and examine an event from multiple perspectives. Primary and secondary sources aren’t directly invoked until grade 6 (in “Minnesota Studies”) and aren’t applied to U.S. History until grade 7. Students are asked to write a thesis statement, present findings, and cite sources, but there is little direct emphasis on research papers, even in high school.

Strengths & Weaknesses of the Minnesota U.S. History Standards

Strengths

1. Minnesota is one of a handful of states to require two full U.S. History surveys—one in grades 5 and 7 and the second in high school.
2. The U.S. History content outlines at least touch on many essential points.
3. History related skills are generally well-handled.

Weaknesses

1. In general, the U.S. History content outlines are rushed and lacking in substantive detail.
2. Coverage of the 1970s and 1980s is weak.

In principle, the robust Literacy in History/Social Studies Standards section of Minnesota’s ELA standards (which is required, according to the state’s website, but not actually mentioned in the social studies standards) adds considerable depth to the skills from grades 6–12. These standards delineate relevant reading, analysis, and writing skills for grade bands 6–8, 9–10, and 11–12, including analyzing the structure, intent, target audience, and use of evidence in sources; integrating information from multiple sources into a coherent interpretation; and presenting those interpretations in written form.

Clarity and Organization: 2/3

As discussed in the Civics portion of this review, Minnesota’s organizational structure is somewhat rigid and cumbersome. However, the social studies document explains itself reasonably well and is generally usable, and the fact that the fixed history standards are generally chronological makes them far less intrusive than they would be if they were thematic.

U.S. History scope and sequence are all but nonexistent through grade 4. The “Foundations of Social Studies” emphasis and scattershot references to historical content leave any actual content focus undefined. Matters improve with the specific U.S. History courses in grades 5 and 7, where the course outlines focus on conventional U.S. History material and define course scope clearly enough. And the high school U.S. History survey is similarly clear in its target coverage.

Finally, Minnesota deserves praise for its decision to offer two full passes through U.S. History—one in fifth and seventh grade and a second in high school.

Recommendations

Civics

1. **Provide more detailed content guidance, especially in high school** (e.g., by adding references to specific powers, institutions, and processes of the three branches of government; specific elements of the

electoral process such as voter access, campaign finance, and redistricting; and specific Supreme Court cases).

2. **Strengthen the coverage of comparative politics in grade 8** (e.g., by including references to nonconstitutional, parliamentary, unitary, and confederate systems, as well as alternatives to “first past the post”).

U.S. History

1. **Provide more substantive detail and explanation** to promote shared exposure to essential content.
2. **Devote more space to the post-1970 era.**

Both Subjects

1. **Simplify the organization** (e.g., by doing away with the fixed, recurring standards).

Documents Reviewed

- “Minnesota K–12 Academic Standards: Social Studies,” 2011, <https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/stds/soc/>
- “Literacy in History/Social Studies Standards,” in Minnesota ELA standards, pp. 80–90, <https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/stds/soc/>

Revisions to the Minnesota social studies standards are currently underway.

Mississippi

A	Exemplary	10
	Standards worthy of implementation	9
B	Good	8
	Targeted revisions recommended	7
C	Mediocre	6
	Significant revisions strongly recommended	5
D	Inadequate	4
	Complete revision recommended before implementation	3
2		
0-1		

Civics: B

Content & Rigor: 5/7

Clarity & Organization: 2/3

Total Score: 7/10

U.S. History:¹ B-

Content & Rigor: 5/7

Clarity & Organization: 2/3

Total Score: 7/10

Overview

Mississippi's civics and U.S. History standards are reasonably good. But inconsistent coverage and organizational issues detract from their often rich and sophisticated content. Targeted revisions are recommended.

Description of the Standards

Mississippi's social studies standards provide individual outlines for each grade K-8 and a variety of high school courses, including U.S. History, U.S. Government, Mississippi Studies, and African American Studies.

At the K-6 level, the standards are divided into five strands—civics, civil rights, economics, geography, and history—each of which is supplied with numbered standards that are associated with multiple objectives. However, the standards for grades 7 and 8 and the high school courses are arranged thematically or chronologically (though the aforementioned strands are noted parenthetically).

In addition to what appears to be a default sequence for grades K-8, the introductory material also lays out several alternative sequences for grades 6-9 and 7-12. However, the standards are vague regarding which courses are actually required at the high school level.

Civics: B

In Brief

Although Mississippi’s civics standards are often impressively nuanced and forward thinking, coverage of some core content is frustratingly uneven, skills development is largely implicit, and organization in the higher grades is needlessly complex.

Content and Rigor: 5/7

K–8

For better or worse, several strands of Mississippi’s social studies standards house essential civics content. For example, the civics and civil rights strands for grades K–2 include standards on rules, authority figures in the community, individuals who have exemplified good citizenship, and the importance of tolerance and compromise. Similarly, civics in the third grade covers the three branches of local government, how local laws are made and enforced, voting, and the First Amendment, while history in the third grade covers the three branches of the federal government, popular sovereignty, and the expansion of voting rights.

In fourth grade, where the focus is on state government, the actual civics objectives are frustratingly vague. For example, an objective listed under standard CI.4.2 asked students to “examine the rights and freedoms guaranteed to citizens.” Yet the civil rights strand is packed with specifics, including Jim Crow laws, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and *Brown v. Board of Education*. Similarly, the fifth-grade civics standards focus on how the Articles of Confederation led to the Constitution. Yet it’s mainly history, with the actual structure and powers of the federal government and the concept of checks and balances nowhere to be found (though one objective does mention “features” of the Bill of Rights).

At times, the middle school standards also fail to cohere, despite much worthy content. For example, an intriguing sixth-grade standard asks students to consider topics such

as globalization, new media, and emerging security issues. However, due to the shortcomings in earlier grades, it’s not clear that students have the civics foundation required to explore these issues properly. And despite the inclusion of the Magna Carta, the concept of “rule of law” is never explicitly called out in seventh grade (though the standards do cover democracy in Ancient Greece and the Roman Republic). Finally, because eighth-grade history content ends in 1877, the civics content also ends there, meaning that students don’t study the full evolution of voting rights or modern political parties (among other topics) until high school.

In short, despite much worthy content, there is a risk that some crucial subjects (such as the nuts and bolts of the United States government) will never be explicitly addressed at the K–8 level due to the predominantly historical lens.

High School

The high school government course comprises seven standards, which cover a tremendous amount of material for a one-semester course. However, the first standard, USG.1, is so vague (“compare and contrast knowledge and application of the basic concepts of democracy”) that it could be safely deleted, especially as many of its objectives are discussed elsewhere.

A highlight of the high school standards is USG.6, which asks to students to “describe the role and function of linkage institutions such as the media, interest groups, political parties, and political action committees on the citizens and federal government,” a compelling list that should give students a reasonably sophisticated peek behind the curtain of modern politics, provided they are well handled.

In contrast, USG.2, which asks students to “evaluate the foundational American political principles and the historical events, documents, and philosophical ideas that shaped the formation of the United States,” risks becoming another history lesson (at the expense of core civics topics). Tacked onto the end of USG.2, for example, are a couple of drive-by comparative-politics objectives that deal with parliamentary systems and federal, confederal, and unitary systems. But comparative politics really deserves its own discrete standard.

Similarly, the objectives associated with USG.3 (which concerns the three branches of government) suggest solid case studies of presidential power and citations to numerous Supreme Court cases. However, the legislative branch is given short shrift (for example, there is no mention of the specific powers of Congress or of specific pieces of legislation). And the objectives associated with this standard have little to say about how the federal government can affect the economy or how the U.S. interacts with other countries.

Mississippi's final high school civics standard is a potentially compelling hodgepodge. Under the banner of the roles, rights, and responsibilities of citizens, it revisits topics such as the First Amendment, media, and interest groups. It also includes soft concepts such as volunteering and technical issues such as the naturalization process, as well as economic rights (which seldom receive attention in state standards) and important election-related content such as the Electoral College and redistricting. Yet with so many diverse topics, it's hard to ascertain what's truly important.

Skills and Dispositions

Although Mississippi doesn't explicitly identify essential social studies skills, they are implicit in the wording of standards that use verbs like contrast, analyze, and debate. However, though these odds and ends suggest that Mississippi wants its students to think critically, analyze problems, and advocate for causes they believe in, the development of such skills is incidental to the civics standards.

Similarly, although Mississippi's civil rights strand emphasizes the themes of tolerance and respect, objectives concerning civic dispositions can mainly be found in the early grades and are not particularly inspiring. For example, an objective listed under the fifth-grade standard C1.5.2 asks students to "participate in negotiating and compromising in the resolution of differences and conflict," while a high school objective suggests that students "develop and practice a course of action to address local and/or state issues." A better version of this standard would clarify the need for students to use their knowledge of Mississippi government and history to analyze an issue before proposing a solution.

Clarity and Organization: 2/3

In general, Mississippi's standards document is user friendly. For example, although content is divided into strands through grade 6, the grade-level outlines are readable and mercifully free of distracting divisions into substrands or other subdivisions. However, the three lists of possibilities, covering overlapping K–8, 7–12, and 6–9 bands, are needlessly confusing. And the option to address seventh- and eighth-grade material in a "compact" fashion means critical material will get short shrift in classrooms that take this path. Finally, the high school content should be reorganized—for example, by putting all the voting and elections concepts in a single, discrete standard and breaking the branches of government into three separate and discrete standards.

Strengths & Weaknesses of the Mississippi Civics Standards

Strengths

1. The standards cover a great deal of essential content.
2. Many topics are handled in a sophisticated manner at the high school level.
3. The struggle for civil rights is consistently and affirmatively woven into civics content.

Weaknesses

1. Some individual standards are poorly worded.
2. There is very little development of critical thinking skills, and there is not an especially strong cultivation of civic dispositions.

U.S. History: B-

In Brief

Despite much worthy and sophisticated content, Mississippi's U.S. History standards need improvement, thanks to a flawed organizational approach, erratic detail, and problematic gaps.

Content and Rigor: 5/7

K–8

In the early grades, Mississippi's history standards focus on conventional themes such as national symbols, holidays, and patriotic songs, which eventually give way to broad invocations of historical figures and barely defined historical events. Students are asked to identify and use primary sources by grade 2. Grade 3 focuses on the basics of U.S. government (see the Civics portion of this review). Finally, grade 4 is devoted to Mississippi studies, looking at the Civil Rights Movement in reasonable detail under the civil rights strand and rather broadly at Mississippi symbols and history under the history strand.

Grade 5 offers the first identified U.S. History course: Pre-Columbian to American Revolution. However, the strand-based organization fragments material, with the civics strand covering such historical content as the weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation, the Northwest Ordinance, Federalists vs. Anti-Federalists, plans and compromises in drafting the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights. Oddly, the history strand begins by recapping patriotic symbols from early grades, before moving to European Exploration, colonization, and the Columbian Exchange and then continuing into colonial founders, democratic ideas, and colonial governments, with broad invocation of the colonial economy (including the slave trade). Similarly, the American Revolution receives fairly strong treatment. But strangely, the actual Revolution is followed by the events leading to the Revolution, which are in turn followed by pre-Columbian civilizations and national holidays (thus needlessly undermining chronology). Finally, although some objectives include illustrative examples, many point to broad historical issues without detailing or explaining them.

After a two-year hiatus in grades 6 and 7 (which cover civics and the world and early world history), Mississippi's U.S. History sequence resumes in grade 8, which covers everything from European exploration to 1877. Here, again, the standards are substantive but uneven. For example, students are specifically expected to “describe how the English Bill of Rights, the Mayflower Compact, and the Virginia House of Burgesses led to the English Colonial idea of self-government” (8.1.5), yet they are also vaguely asked to “explain colonists’ roles in the French and Indian War” (8.2.1). Furthermore, thematic organization sometimes undermines coherence, and the detail that is provided is erratic (for example, standards on Andrew Jackson mention “the corrupt bargain” but not the expansion of the white male franchise). Still, many key points are at least touched upon, including the Washington presidency, the emergence of the party system, and early Supreme Court cases, as well as abolitionism, sectional schism, industrialization, and women’s suffrage. Finally, slavery is correctly listed first among causes of the Civil War, and specific Reconstruction plans and the Black Codes (which are absent from many states’ standards) are noted.

In short, Mississippi's U.S. History-related middle school standards have considerable potential. Yet there is a catch: Worryingly, the state gives educators the option of moving the eighth-grade U.S. History course to grade 7 and “compacting” it with civics and the world—thus leaving less than a full year for the U.S. History content (as well as the default civics-focused content for seventh grade).

High School

Compared to previous grades, there is a noticeable increase in specific and explanatory detail in the standards for Mississippi's high school U.S. History course, which covers the remainder of U.S. history (i.e., from 1877 to the present). Indeed, the content outline is often impressive. For example, in addition to immigration, Populism, and the Labor Movement, the section on post-Civil War industrialization incorporates topics such as civil service reform and Boss Tweed.

Yet flaws remain. For example, the rise of Jim Crow and the early Civil Rights Movement are lumped into a section on progressivism (though, in fact, the Progressive movement was notably shortsighted on race), and U.S. entry into WWI

is reduced to “the factors that led to U.S. involvement” (US.4.7). Similarly, the inclusion of the Smoot-Hawley tariff in the coming of the Depression is noteworthy, but its appearance before the social history of the 1920s and reappearance in the discussion of the economic collapse is odd. And while Hoover’s initial response to the collapse is an unusual inclusion, coverage of New Deal programs is skimpy.

Coverage of the WWII home front and the Cold War is generally strong, with many specifics. But, again, there are problems. For example, standard US.8.5, which expects students to understand “how the Truman doctrine and Marshall plan deepened the tensions between the U.S. and USSR,” seems to put too much blame on the U.S., and “the U-2 incident” was not part of “the space race.” Moreover, although Cuba is mentioned, the Bay of Pigs and Missile Crisis are not. And in general, discussion of the Kennedy, LBJ, and Nixon eras feels a bit rushed.

Strangely, the Civil Rights Movement—though covered in some detail—appears later, after discussion of the Carter and Reagan eras. Worse, although the antiwar and counterculture movements are listed, Vietnam itself is never mentioned. In contrast, Reagan’s conservative movement is given more space than in many standards (though it is again strange to see the Granada and Panama invasions listed when Vietnam is never mentioned). However, a final standard on events after 1992 is extremely rushed.

In addition to the high school U.S. History course, related topics are addressed in a brief and rather general Mississippi Studies course and a promising but rather uneven African American Studies course. From the suggested sequences, Mississippi Studies appears to be required and African American Studies appears to be an elective.

Skills Development

As noted in the civics review, the Mississippi standards don’t include a separate discussion of skills. However, a few skillsets are invoked in the standards themselves. For example, grade 2 introduces the concept and use of primary sources. And some skills are also implicit in the operative words at the start of each objective, such as identify, explain, outline, and compare.

Clarity and Organization: 2/3

As noted in the Civics section, Mississippi’s standards document is generally clear and user friendly, with the exception of the needlessly confusing lists of sequence options. However, the scope of the U.S. History standards is flawed in at least two ways: First, the single elementary-level U.S. History course covers only a fraction of the subject. Second, the option to “compact” the first half of U.S. history and world civics into a single year of middle school is ill conceived (and likely to do both subjects a disservice).

In addition to these issues, the fifth-grade U.S. History content is also problematically fragmented between different strands, and thematic organization results in some chronological confusion in all courses (including the more detailed high school outline).

Strengths & Weaknesses of the Mississippi U.S. History Standards

Strengths

1. Mississippi requires a two-part survey across middle and high school, covering U.S. History from exploration to the present (though there is not a full U.S. History overview in the primary grades).
2. Substantive content outlining is often impressive, particularly at the high school level.

Weaknesses

1. Content coverage is uneven in elementary and middle school.
2. The organization of objectives under thematic standards leads to chronological confusion.
3. The option to “compact” the first half of the U.S. history course by moving it from grade 8 to grade 7 is ill conceived and substantially reduces the time given to the period before 1877.

Recommendations

Civics

1. Ensure that the basic mechanics of all three branches of government are adequately addressed at both the K-8 level and the high school level.
2. Bolster the treatment of comparative politics and Congress at the high school level.
3. Reorganize the high school content into more narrowly focused standards, with discrete standards for each branch of government, elections, and comparative politics.

U.S. History

1. Revise the content outlines to address the specific gaps noted in the review.
2. Expand U.S. History coverage at the elementary level, ideally by including a full introductory survey by the end of grade 5.

Both Subjects

1. Remove the option for a “compacted” middle school U.S. History/Civics course.
2. Consider identifying and emphasizing essential Civics and/or U.S. History skills and dispositions for each grade or grade band.

Documents Reviewed

- “2018 Mississippi College- and Career-Readiness Standards for the Social Studies,” https://www.mdek12.org/sites/default/files/Page_Docs/final_2018_mississippi_ccr_social_studies_standards.pdf

ENDNOTES

1. Because reviewers had discretion to add a “+” or “-” to a state’s letter grade, some states earned slightly different grades despite receiving identical scores.

Missouri

A	Exemplary	10
	Standards worthy of implementation	9
B	Good	8
	Targeted revisions recommended	7
C	Mediocre	6
	Significant revisions strongly recommended	5
D	Inadequate	4
	Complete revision recommended before implementation	3
F		2
		0-1

Civics: C

Content & Rigor: 4/7

Clarity & Organization: 1/3

Total Score: 5/10

U.S. History: C

Content & Rigor: 4/7

Clarity & Organization: 1/3

Total Score: 5/10

Overview

Missouri’s civics and U.S. History standards are mediocre. Although the building blocks for solid U.S. History and civics standards are there, broad language robs both disciplines of depth, and strand-based organization undermines the coherent presentation of content. Significant revisions are strongly recommended.

Description of the Standards

Missouri offers social studies standards in two formats. One set of documents (K–5 and 6–12) is arranged by theme. A second set of “teacher view” documents, which is organized by grade level, “includes details and resources classroom teachers may find helpful” and is the subject of this review. The teacher view outlines are provided for each K–5 grade, three 6–8 courses (American History, World History, and Geography), and three high school courses (American History, World History, and Government). The K–5 outlines include the grade-level theme, a short introduction, and “potential inquiry questions.” The remainder of each grade is divided into strands, which are subdivided into “concepts” that are supplied with one or more “grade-level expectations” (GLEs). Middle and high school course outlines are organized by “themes,” each of which features an introductory paragraph and a chart dividing the GLEs between strands. The first theme in each course is devoted to “Tools of Social Science Inquiry,” while subsequent themes address course content.

Civics: C

In Brief

Missouri’s civics standards provide broad coverage of most basic civics content. But crucial details are missing, and the strand-based approach to organization is unhelpful, especially in high school.

Content and Rigor: 4/7

K-8

Missouri hits key civics themes repeatedly in grades K-5. Individual rights appear generically in grades K-3 before attention turns to the Bill of Rights in grades 4-5. Commendably, the three branches of government are covered in second, third, and fourth grades. Every year, except Kindergarten, reviews how “authoritative decisions” are made, enforced, and interpreted. Both grades 2 and 3 look at how laws are made and changed. Peaceful dispute resolution, with reference to the court system, is a topic in grades 3, 4, and 5 (taxes, how citizens can bring about change, and an introduction to federalism all appear, although not with the same repetition as other concepts). In general, the way each year builds on the last is well done, though coverage of state and national symbols could probably be limited to the earlier grades.

Grade 4 asks students to examine the Declaration of Independence, U.S. Constitution, and Bill of Rights “with assistance.” For example, GLE 4.PC.1.C.b asks students to “identify important principles in the Bill of Rights, such as basic rights and freedoms (for rights listed, see Amendments 1-8; for rights not listed, see Amendment 9).” This is a good start, but for teachers who are wondering which “principles” or which of the thirty-plus rights in the first eight amendments to focus on, it’s not as helpful as it could be. Similarly, grade 5 returns to these documents and connects them to historical and current events in a general way (e.g., “Apply the principles of the Bill of Rights to historical time periods being studied and to current events”). But again, some more specific guidance or some concrete examples would make a world of difference, and other GLEs are similarly far ranging and ill-defined. For example, students

are expected to “analyze peaceful resolution of disputes by courts or other legitimate authorities in U.S. History from 1800-2000” (5.GS.B).

The middle school World History course also provides essential background information for students of civics, including the codification of law in ancient civilizations, the origins of direct and representative democracy, and how Magna Carta furthered the rule of law. However, the coverage of civics in the American History course is a mixed bag, touching on vital concepts but with broadly and sometimes vaguely written GLEs. For example, students are expected to “analyze landmark Supreme Court cases to determine the effect on the definition and expansion of federal power” (4.1.B), and several other GLEs contain laundry lists, raising the possibility that crucial concepts will be glossed over. For example, students are expected to “apply the principles of rule of law, representation, separation of powers, checks and balances, and federalism to explain the purposes and functions of the Constitution” (3.2.C). Ideally, each of those ideas would receive its own GLE.

High School

The high school American Government class contains a fair bit of history, including the codification of laws in early civilizations, the reasons for the Revolution, the philosophy of the Declaration of Independence, the Articles of Confederation, and the Constitutional Convention. But again, several of the GLEs are laundry lists with no breathing room for big concepts (e.g., “Apply the concepts of due process of law, popular sovereignty, rule of law, representation, and federalism to explain the purpose and legacy of the Constitution”). Other GLEs indicate that a major civics topic should be studied but with wholly inadequate detail (e.g., “Analyze the unique roles and responsibilities of the three branches of government to determine how they function and interact”). And similar critiques might be leveled at the standards on the Bill of Rights and subsequent amendments, federalism, political parties, and elections. Many critical civics concepts are called out by name in the American Government course, yet there are no examples, nuances, or subsidiary points—and thus, there is little sense of scope. Items such as redistricting, campaign finance, and party primaries could all fit under the umbrella of one GLE or another, but this crucial secondary level of detail is missing. Comparative government receives light treatment with a GLE

that compares and contrasts democratic governments to authoritarian governments. Major Supreme Court cases such as *Marbury v. Madison* and *Brown v. Board of Education* were inexplicably removed in the last round of revisions. Finally, some crucial topics are simply missing. For example, interest groups get a mention, but the role of the media does not.

Skills and Dispositions

Grades K–5 have numerous GLEs about character traits, civic attitudes, and how active and informed citizens can make a difference in their communities. In middle school, several GLEs in the “people, groups, and cultures” strand touch on the differing experiences and perspectives of diverse populations, but any civic dispositions—such as respect and tolerance—that these GLEs inculcate would be incidental. In high school, only theme 4 truly touches on civic participation, and it does so in general terms: “Explain a citizen’s legal obligations, as well as opportunities for, engaging with and using local, state, and federal governments to shape decision-making [sic].”

Strengths & Weaknesses of the Missouri Civics Standards

Strengths

1. The K–5 Civics standards have a thoughtful progression that appropriately emphasizes core content.
2. The high school course provides some basic coverage of many important topics.

Weaknesses

1. In general, the breadth of the expectations in grades 6–8 and high school provides teachers with inadequate guidance.
2. As the grade level increases, the reliance on strands becomes a barrier to effective organization.

The “tools for social science inquiry” strand asks students in later elementary grades to distinguish between fact and opinion and to recognize bias, but most of the elementary school skills are about basic research and presentation. Middle school similarly has no civics-specific skills, such as advocacy or debating a current event. However, there are a couple of good skills GLEs in the American Government course. For example, students are expected to “analyze the causes and consequences of a specific issue tied to government as well as the challenges and opportunities faced by those trying to address the problem.”

Clarity and Organization: 1/3

Missouri’s decision to offer its standards in two radically different forms causes immediate confusion. The teacher view version reviewed here at least organizes content by grade or course—a substantial improvement over the alternate version—but even it is visually cluttered and unnecessarily difficult to use.

Although the reliance on thematic strands isn’t a problem in grades K–5 and is only minimally intrusive in grades 6–8, it causes problems at the high school level, where concepts that should be grouped together are spread across strands and some GLEs feel like filler, inserted to check off the box of a particular strand. In particular, the geography strand contains some less than vital information, such as how geography influenced the governmental systems that developed in North America. If the thematic strand format were abandoned, stronger standards would likely emerge.

U.S. History: C

In Brief

Missouri is one of the few states to require two full U.S. History surveys, the first across grades 4 and 5 and the second across middle and high school; however, its U.S. History-related standards are too broad, and the over-reliance on thematic strands scatters what should be related history content across the document.

Content and Rigor: 4/7

K-8

The social studies standards for grades K–2 work outward from individual and family to school, community, state, and nation. The history strand glances at concepts of past and present and important individuals in U.S. History, most of whom are associated with federal holidays. Grade 2 also mentions the lifeways and art of Native American cultures, and the civics strands add references to the Constitution, Bill of Rights, and various patriotic symbols.

Grade 3 focuses on Missouri history, 1600 to present, though the twelve brief and general GLEs mention nothing later than the Civil War. Slavery and the Dred Scott decision are noted but without context or explanation. Missouri statehood appears, but not the Missouri Compromise.

Commendably, Missouri devotes grades 4 and 5 to a two-part U.S. History overview; unfortunately, however, content coverage remains thin. For example, grade 4 is meant to run from Native American settlement to 1799, but the History strand has only ten brief and very general GLEs. Slavery is touched upon (Colonial self-government is not), along with the American Revolution, founding documents, and westward expansion before 1800. But it can barely be called an outline, and other strands add little of historical substance. Similarly, grade 5 is meant to cover U.S. history from 1800 to 2000. But again, there are only ten broad and often vague GLEs in the history strand. For example, students are expected to “identify political, economic, and social causes and consequences of the Civil War and Reconstruction” (5.H.3.G), but no specific causes or consequences are mentioned. Incredibly, the twentieth century gets just three GLEs, mentioning the Depression, the two world wars, and the Cold War. Many key events and issues appear solely on a suggested list of political events, including Constitutional amendments, Reconstruction, the Industrial Revolution and the Gilded Age, the Civil Rights movement, and more.

The middle school U.S. History course seeks to cover everything from pre-Columbian civilizations to 1870. The outline is divided into four roughly chronological “themes,” each headed by a short introductory paragraph and containing almost as many GLEs as grades 4 and 5 combined. However, the GLEs still tend to be broadly conceptual

with few specifics and little explanation. For example, the theme on the Colonial period touches on a number of important issues, including early arrivals of indigenous peoples, European reasons for settlement, and the British mercantile system, but the coverage is broad and shallow (Colonial systems of government and “sources of labor” are mentioned, but self-government and the rise of slavery are not). Similarly, the “founding” theme directs students to trace the events leading to the Revolution and explain the major Constitutional debates and their resolution—but no specifics are discussed.

In addition to this lack of detail, the decision to split the content within each theme among five strands badly undermines chronology and coherence. For example, the “founding” theme includes passing references to British tax acts, the Bill of Rights, and judicial review, disparate issues of the period that are scattered across strands and never presented in chronological sequence or explained in context. Chronology is also undermined by overly thematic organization; for example, “Manifest Destiny” is invoked in the theme on “settlements,” long before the term applies.

The “expansion” theme manages some more specifics but remains disjointed. Jacksonian democracy, Manifest Destiny (now correctly placed in time), territorial expansion, forced removal of Native Americans, unspecified Supreme Court cases, tariffs and taxation, and reform movements are mentioned but split between strands and not explicated or linked. Despite a vague reference to Northern and Southern responses to various “challenges” of the period, there is no direct reference to slavery until the final “Conflict and Crisis” Theme, which does note “political compromises over slavery in the territories” and mentions abolitionism. But all GLEs remain extremely general. For example, there is a reference to the election of 1860 but no discussion of secession or its causes.

High School

The high school course runs from Reconstruction to the present and shares the middle school course’s deficiencies: overbroad GLEs that point to major issues without explaining them and content that is fragmented among the five thematic strands. The “re-emerging America” theme jumbles together Reconstruction, westward expansion, immigration, and laissez-faire but with little order or explanation. The “emerging globally” theme continues the pattern. For

example, students are simply expected to “describe and evaluate the motivations for United States entry into World War I”—though one item on the war’s domestic impact does at least mention pro-war and antiwar groups, struggles for and against racial equality, and the changing role of women.

The “Great Depression and WWII” theme notes the existence of New Deal programs, the changing role of government, isolationism, arts and human costs in the Depression, the growing U.S. global role, and so on but again without detail or explanation. The “American stage” theme covers postwar America and the Cold War in similar fashion. The expectation that students “analyze the origins, goals, and key events of the continuing U.S. movements to realize equal rights for women, African Americans and other minorities” provides insufficient guidance for the Civil Rights era—and the 1970s and 1980s are not referenced at all. Finally, the theme on “contemporary America” notes the end of the Cold War, subsequent conflicts, information distribution, and debates over government powers but only in general terms.

Notably, each theme gets a bibliography of possible primary and secondary sources for further study, but these bare lists are spotty and disconnected from the outlines.

Strengths & Weaknesses of the Missouri U.S. History Standards

Strengths

1. Missouri is one of the few states to require two full U.S. History surveys, one in grades 4 and 5 and a second in middle and high school.
2. Missouri’s social studies standards offer a reasonably strong emphasis on history-related skills.

Weaknesses

1. Most individual standards are very general, with few specifics or examples.
2. Thematic organization undermines chronology and coherence in both U.S. History surveys.

Skills Development

Missouri emphasizes skills at both the K–5 and 6–12 grade levels. Each K–5 grade includes a “tools of social science inquiry” strand, and the middle and high school courses open with a theme of the same title.

In early grades, history-related skills focus on identifying and using sources and sharing conclusions. Primary and secondary sources—defined in the hyperlinked glossary—are introduced in grade 1. Students are expected to conduct and share research by grade 2, distinguish between facts and opinions by grade 3, and recognize bias by grade 4. Though presentation of findings is stressed throughout, there is little direct reference to written presentation of research.

In the middle and high school courses, the “tools of social science” theme is divided between the same five strands as the content themes. As a result, some of the “tools” GLEs lean toward content and away from skills (for example, by asking students to analyze the effect of governmental systems, costs and benefits of economic policies, or social structures and stratification during the course’s chronological span). However, because no specifics are offered, these add little to the content outlines. Students are to develop, pursue, and present a research project, meant to encompass multiple points of view. But, again, there is no specific reference to producing written work.

Clarity and Organization: 1/3

As discussed under the Civics section of this review, the two versions of Missouri’s standards create confusion, and even the superior teacher view documents—organized by grade or course rather than exclusively by theme—are visually jumbled and hard to use. The U.S. History sequence is clear, at least in the teacher view version. Each grade or course has an explicitly assigned topic, and the grade 4 and 5 courses give date ranges (though the scope of the middle and high school U.S. History courses must be teased out from the sparse details in the GLEs). Organization by strand seems reasonable in early grades, where the social studies focus for each year is broad. But beginning with grades 4 and 5, where social studies content is meant to be devoted specifically to an introductory U.S. History survey, the strands become intrusive, fragmenting material thematically and undermining the chronological coherence of the already thin GLEs.

Recommendations

Civics

1. **Reorganize the high school course on American Government** (e.g., by abandoning “strands” and devoting at least one discrete and nuanced standard to each branch of the federal government, as well as topics like federalism, judicial review, due process, equal protection, electoral process, and comparative politics).
2. **Wherever possible, include some well-chosen examples** (e.g., Supreme Court cases and acts of Congress).

U.S. History

1. **Organize the history courses in grades 4–11 chronologically, rather than by theme or strand.**

Both subjects

1. **Provide deeper and more specific guidance, especially in higher grade levels.**

Documents Reviewed

- “Missouri Social Studies Grade Level Expectations K–5 – Teacher View,” 2016, <http://dese.mo.gov/sites/default/files/curr-mls-standards-teacher-view-ss-k-5-2016.docx>
- “Missouri Social Studies Middle School American History – Teacher View,” 2016, <http://dese.mo.gov/sites/default/files/curr-mls-standards-teacher-view-ss-msah-k-5-04.25.16.docx>
- “Missouri Social Studies High School American History – Teacher View,” 2016, <http://dese.mo.gov/sites/default/files/curr-mls-standards-teacher-view-ss-hsah-k-5-04.25.16.docx>
- “Missouri Social Studies High School American Government – Teacher View,” 2016, <http://dese.mo.gov/sites/default/files/curr-mls-standards-teacher-view-ss-hsgov-k-5-04.25.16.docx>

Montana

A	Exemplary	10
	Standards worthy of implementation	9
B	Good	8
	Targeted revisions recommended	7
C	Mediocre	6
	Significant revisions strongly recommended	5
D	Inadequate	4
	Complete revision recommended before implementation	3
2		
0-1		
F		

Civics: F

Content & Rigor: 1/7

Clarity & Organization: 1/3

Total Score: 2/10

U.S. History: F

Content & Rigor: 0/7

Clarity & Organization: 0/3

Total Score: 0/10

Overview

Montana's new civics and U.S. History standards are inadequate, failing to offer useful guidance in either subject due to their cosmic breadth and extreme vagueness. A complete revision is recommended.

Description of the Standards

Montana provides outlines for each elementary grade level (K-5) and for the 6-8 and 9-12 grade bands. Each grade or grade band is divided into four strands (civics and government, economics, geography, and history), each of which is supplied with one or more lettered standards.

Notably, Montana is one of a handful of states that don't specifically require high school students to take courses in civics or U.S. History to graduate.

Civics: F

In Brief

Montana’s civics standards are few in number and filled with such broad and ambiguous language that it is impossible to ascertain course content.

Content and Rigor: 1/7

K-8

Montana’s new civics standards are far too slender. For the earliest grades, extremely broad standards about demonstrating citizenship, following rules, and understanding the roles of different community members are cursory but not fatal. However, by grade 3, the lack of specific content does a real disservice to students. To wit, students in third grade are expected to describe the functions of local government (which in Montana’s telling includes tribal governments), recognize a paltry list of what civic participation entails (“remaining accurately informed about public issues, taking action, and voting in elections”), and be able to identify (unspecified) “key symbols of nations.” But no further information is provided.

Things get worse in grade 4, which follows standards on tribal sovereignty and “foundational” Montana documents (none of which are identified) with the unworkably broad expectation that students “describe how rules, laws, and policies are implemented by local, state, national, and tribal governments.” Similarly, the standards for grade 5 suggest that students “examine the diverse origins, ideals, and purposes of rules, laws, and key United States constitutional provisions and other foundational documents,” as well as the basic “duties” (but not powers) of the three branches of government and the different levels of government. In all of these cases, the absence of any meaningful parameters or specifics is likely to lead to very different content in different classrooms.

The middle school bar is set even lower, with a total of seven standards for all of grades 6–8. In the broadest and vaguest terms, students examine “a variety of forms of government,” more unspecified “foundational documents,” events and leaders that advanced civil rights, “strategies for civic

involvement,” and the structure and powers of local, state, national, and tribal governments. Again, the standards are so broadly written that it’s unclear if vital topics such as the First Amendment will be included in a school’s curriculum. Essential content should be explicitly stated, not left to the novice social studies teacher’s imagination.

High School

Like the K–8 standards, Montana’s twelve high school civics standards are too brief and broad to provide educators with any useful guidance. For example, the first standard includes more “foundational documents” that establish a system of “powers, responsibilities, and limits,” while a standard on “deliberative processes” hints at the existence of legislatures. Yet incredibly, there is no reference to any of the three branches of government or to basic concepts such as Federalism or checks and balances.

Meanwhile, at least three standards address how the United States interacts with the wider world and how the governmental systems of different countries compare (topics that receive scant attention in other states’ standards, though Montana’s don’t provide much of a model). Another two standards touch on addressing problems and changing society but are so broadly and vaguely worded that it’s hard to know what they are driving at (though the intent of the standard on how citizens and institutions can ensure civil rights is somewhat clearer). One standard deals with the application of unspecified civic virtues “when working with others.” And yet another highly ambiguous standard asks students to “analyze the impact and roles of personal interests and perspectives, market, media, and group influences on the application of civic virtues, democratic principles, constitutional rights, and human rights.”

The complexity of federally recognized tribes’ sovereign status in Montana rounds out the topics that are considered by high school civics, though the high school economics standards mention the role of government policies on the economy.

Skills and Dispositions

Montana does not have separate skills standards for social studies. However, to the extent that the history standards touch on identifying bias, differing perspectives, and the credibility of sources, these skills are also relevant to civics.

For each of the elementary grades, there is a civics standard about demonstrating good citizenship or civic participation, and there is one high school standard about applying civic virtue and democratic principles when working with others. However, there is no specific guidance in any of these endeavors.

Clarity and Organization: 1/3

Montana’s fifteen-page standards document for K–12 social studies is easy enough to use, presenting each grade or grade band in sequence, with the four strands and their associated standards listed straightforwardly. Unfortunately, there is almost no reason to use the document, as it provides essentially no content or hint of the intended sequence or scope due to the general dearth of parameters in all grade levels. In addition to this general shortcoming, several of the high school standards are confusing and ambiguous.

Strengths & Weaknesses of the Montana Civics Standards

Strengths

1. Montana builds the notions of civic participation, citizenship, or civic virtue into almost every grade or grade band.

Weaknesses

1. Many standards are too broad to provide useful guidance.
2. Most essential content is missing, including all three branches of government.
3. There is no discernible scope or sequence.
4. The wording of some standards is confusing or ambiguous.

U.S. History: F

In Brief

For all practical purposes, Montana has no U.S. History standards. No course sequence is defined at any level, nor is any actual content specified in the absurdly broad expectations.

Content and Rigor: 0/7

K–8

The standards for early grades direct students to understand concepts of past and present and introduce a heavy (though never substantive) focus on Native Americans in and beyond Montana. In grade 1, a reference to historical contexts and perspectives mentions only Montana’s tribes. In grade 2, one of the three history standards invokes the twelve Montana tribes, while another mentions oral histories of American Indians as a category of historical source. Of two grade 3 history standards, one is skills focused while the other directs students to identify Montana’s tribes by original and current names. Of the four grade 4 history standards, one is skills based, two again invoke the “unique histories” of Montana tribes and their impact on events and policies, and the fourth tells students to explain the impact of cultural diversity on Montana over time. Finally, grade 5’s five standards toss in a few skills before turning to a vague invocation of the impact of individuals and groups on U.S. and tribal history, which is followed by two equally nonspecific items on Indians. In short, there is no substantive content—tribal or otherwise—in any elementary grade.

Nine history standards are offered for the entire 6–8 grade band. Several are broadly skills focused. None offer any historical specifics or any hint of course sequence. Students are expected to explore continuity and change in civilizations and eras in Montana, the Americas, and the world (but no civilizations or eras are specified). They are to analyze how historical events interrelate and are shaped by context, including in the Americas, as well as how events and policies have impacted American Indian and “European” (presumably meaning American of European descent) societies since

European contact. Finally, they must explain how Montana has changed over time and how its history impacts the present. That is as specific as the middle school history strand gets.

High School

The history strand for grades 9–12 contains fourteen single-sentence standards. Again, there is no reference to any specific historical era, event, or individual, nor is there any hint of course sequence or intended scope. Even basic chronological parameters are absent.

As in the grades 6–8 band, many of the standards focus on broad analytical skills. In fact, only three even hint at any sort of factual focus. Specifically, students are asked to analyze continuity and change in “historical eras” of U.S. and world history, to analyze causal factors that shaped major events in U.S. and world history, and to analyze the perspectives of American Indians in U.S. history.

That is the entirety of state-level guidance on sequence, scope, and content for high school U.S. History in the public schools of Montana.

Strengths & Weaknesses of the Montana U.S. History Standards

Strengths

1. Montana offers a modest—if shallow—focus on history-related skills.

Weaknesses

1. There is no actual history in Montana’s history standards.
2. There is no suggested course sequence for U.S. History.
3. Most individual standards are absurdly broad.

Skills Development

In the complete absence of course outlines or content guidance, Montana devotes much of its brief history strands to skills and analytical concepts. Grades K–2 invoke concepts of past and present, the influence of historical context and perspectives, and the existence of sources. Little is added in grades 3 and 4, which refer to change over time and the impact of individual perspectives. Grade 5 mentions the interrelation of historical events, the unique perspectives of American Indians, and historical documents relating to Montana tribes (though none are specified). Grades 6–8 largely repeat the skills outlined in earlier grades, though primary and secondary sources and the potential limitations and biases of sources are also mentioned. Finally, students are to understand that questions shape conclusions.

The high school history strand again invokes concepts such as change over time, context, and perspective, adding slightly more ambitious references to multiple causal factors, intended and unintended consequences, and long-term causes vs. triggering events. Students are also told to integrate evidence from multiple sources into a reasoned argument and, rather redundantly, to construct arguments that reflect understanding and analysis of multiple sources, perspectives, and contexts. However, there is no reference to written (or any other form of) presentation.

Clarity and Organization: 0/3

As discussed in the Civics portion of the review, Montana’s social studies standards document is easy enough to use but offers effectively nothing to use.

U.S. History is occasionally mentioned as a concept, but there is no hint of what periods or subject matter should be taught in any given grade or grade band (thus, there is no basis for constructing a defensible scope or sequence).

Recommendations

Both Subjects

1. **Offer substantive guidance in Civics and U.S. History** with the goal of ensuring that students across Montana share exposure to essential content.

Documents Reviewed

- “Montana Content Standards for Social Studies,” 2021 (approved Nov. 5, 2020), <http://opi.mt.gov/Educators/Teaching-Learning/K-12-Standards-Revision/Social-Studies-Standards>

Nebraska

A	Exemplary	10
	Standards worthy of implementation	9
B	Good	8
	Targeted revisions recommended	7
C	Mediocre	6
	Significant revisions strongly recommended	5
D	Inadequate	4
F	Complete revision recommended before implementation	3
		2
		0-1

Civics: D

Content & Rigor: 2/7

Clarity & Organization: 1/3

Total Score: 3/10

U.S. History:¹ D-

Content & Rigor: 2/7

Clarity & Organization: 1/3

Total Score: 3/10

Overview

Nebraska’s civics and U.S. History standards are inadequate. In addition to containing little of substance—especially in history—their rigid organization inhibits the complete and logical presentation of content. A complete revision is recommended.

Description of the Standards

Nebraska offers individual outlines for every grade K–8 and for four high school subject areas, including civics and U.S. History. Each K–8 outline opens with a short “summary and theme” and is then divided between four disciplines—civics, economics, geography, and history—which are subdivided into a fixed set of “Big Ideas.” Each Big Idea that is addressed in each grade receives one or more target standards, which are broken up into more specific “indicators.” The structure of the high school outline is identical, except that the standards and indicators apply to all grades 9–12. Notably, Nebraska law doesn’t specifically require high school students to take courses in civics or U.S. History (though these topics are theoretically supposed to be incorporated into their social studies coursework).

Civics: D

In Brief

With its overbroad indicators and laundry lists of examples, Nebraska offers inadequate civics guidance and makes it hard to distinguish between essential and nonessential content.

Content and Rigor: 2/7

K-8

At every grade level, Nebraska divides its civics standards between “Forms and Functions of Government” and “Civic Participation.” In the early grades, the former focuses on the importance of rules, while the latter focuses on symbols, songs, and holidays, as well as ways to participate, individuals who exemplify civic engagement, and the responsibilities of citizenship. However, the contents of “Forms and Functions of Government” become more substantive as the grade level increases. For example, grade 3 looks at local government, especially the roles of leaders and citizens in the community, which students are somewhat repetitively expected to compare, contrast, investigate, summarize, and justify. Similarly, grade 4 turns to state government, focusing on Nebraska’s Constitution; the “origin, structure, and function” of its state government; how a bill becomes a law in the Union’s only unicameral legislature; and the roles of state leaders. Multiple examples include references to the three branches of government.

The federal government is the focus of grade 5, with indicators about the Constitution, the three branches of government, the principles of the American Republic, and examinations of noteworthy individuals and groups in the Founding Era. But the quality is uneven. For example, one woolly indicator suggests that students “justify the principles of the American Republic...for example: liberty, representative democracy, United States Constitution, Bill of Rights” (SS 5.1.1.e). Yet another indicator suggests that students summarize the contributions of early state constitutions, the Declaration of Independence, the Articles of Confederation, Magna Carta, the English Bill of

Rights, and tribal constitutions to the formation of the U.S. government (SS 5.1.1.a). This is better, but it needs much more unpacking. Finally, an indicator that suggests students “explain the structure and functions” of the three branches of government is sensible but would be stronger if it included things like checks and balances and the separation of powers.

Because it focuses on early world history, grade 6 is understandably light on civics. However, it does include different forms of government in ancient civilizations (though the inclusion of “tribal” and “tyranny” is confusing), the development of written laws (which are confusingly lumped together with “artifacts”), and important government principles (democracy, rule of law, justice, equality, toleration). Similarly, grade 7 contains some study of comparative government, a random list of historic events and documents (ranging from the Iroquois Confederacy to “arms control”), a vague assessment of how government has changed over time, examples of cooperation and conflict around the world, and an indicator that addresses the role of the media on government.

Finally, grade 8 addresses “the ideas, issues, and events from the adoption of the United States Constitution through the Gilded Age” with a series of overbroad indicators with decidedly unhelpful examples. For example, one indicator suggests students “examine the development of foundational laws and other documents in the United States government...for example: Declaration of Independence, United States Constitution, Preamble, Bill of Rights” (SS 8.1.1.c). Yet no further details are provided, nor is there any effort to link these documents to the historical era that is the grade’s focus. Students also “evaluate how various United States government decisions impact people, place, and history” (SS 8.1.1.d) and “describe how important government principles are shown in American government” (SS 8.1.1.d). Both indicators are so general as to be meaningless and are followed by examples that are either obvious (e.g., “Civil War”) or cryptic (e.g., “Census”). Meanwhile, the “civic participation” topic jumps nonsensically between “contacting government officials”; “tribal flag songs”; “mock trials, elections, etc.”; “Jim Crow laws”; and “Chief Standing Bear.”

What are practicing educators supposed to do with this information?

High School

The examples associated with the high school indicators include some of civics' greatest hits—natural rights, social contract theory, political parties, and so forth. But collectively, the fourteen indicators don't lay out a comprehensive course of instruction. The "structures of U.S. government" and "functions of U.S. government" indicators include a hodgepodge of examples, from the obvious (e.g., checks and balances) to the seriously misplaced (e.g., Prohibition). Also included in the examples for these indicators are the Bill of Rights, federalism, the Civil War Amendments, and "branches of government"—none of which, apparently, deserve individualized treatment. Simply acknowledging the existence of a topic (e.g., "judicial interpretation") does not guarantee thorough coverage, but often a naked recitation of key terms is all Nebraska has to offer.

The topic of elections is particularly ill-served by Nebraska's format, with the Electoral College in one indicator, redistricting in another, political parties in another, and voting spread across yet another pair of indicators. Meanwhile, the indicators on supranational organizations and foreign policy are essentially scope-less ("methods, approaches, events, and

their outcomes on various groups of people"). Notably, the high school economics course covers the government's role in the economy, and history mentions women's suffrage and the Civil Rights Movement. But it's anyone's guess how it's all supposed to fit together.

Skills and Dispositions

To its credit, Nebraska places significant emphasis on the cultivation of skills and dispositions that are essential to citizenship. In every grade, there is at least one "civic participation" indicator, and most grades have at least five or six indicators in this bucket. Students in grade 2 are expected to demonstrate conflict-management strategies, while those in grade 3 engage in respectful discourse. There are five references to volunteerism and seven references to "service learning." Of the fourteen high school indicators, six touch on dispositions and skills, including but not limited to "discussing current issues" and engaging in "online civic reasoning."

Like the rest of the standards, those dealing with skills and dispositions aren't particularly clear or focused, but the overarching message does get through.

Strengths & Weaknesses of the Nebraska Civics Standards

Strengths

1. Nebraska consistently drives home the importance of civic participation and asks students to look to their communities and to history for examples of good citizenship.

Weaknesses

1. Organization is poor.
2. There is little detail, especially in high school.
3. Many of the "examples" are confusing, if not downright misleading.
4. Some essential content is missing.

Clarity and Organization: 1/3

The way that Nebraska's social studies standards are presented is reasonably straightforward (it is not especially difficult to locate or understand grade and course outlines). However, the underlying organization, though not hard to follow, is deeply flawed. The recurring Big Ideas impose a rigid structure on all grades and courses, making it hard to tailor structure to content. Furthermore, many individual indicators are too broad or vague to be useful without some sort of clarification. Yet, as noted, the lists of examples that accompany many indicators often mix crucial material with less important information, effectively obscuring essential content.

Finally, the high school civics standards have no obvious home, as they aren't associated with any specific course. Although this is consistent with Nebraska law, which calls for at least two high school courses that devote "time" to Civics and U.S. History, this format is inherently limited and far less likely to achieve the intended purpose than a straightforward requirement that students take a year of U.S. History and *at least* a semester of civics, with standards that specifically outline the content that each of those courses should cover.²

U.S. History: D-

In Brief

Nebraska’s rigidly thematic standards do not even attempt a substantive historical outline, stressing analysis over memorization yet doing almost nothing to help teachers and districts identify the actual history to be analyzed.

Content and Rigor: 2/7

K-8

The “Big Ideas” for the history strand, in all grades, are “Change, Continuity, and Context,” “Multiple Perspectives,” “Historical Analysis and Interpretation,” and “Historical Inquiry and Research.”

Early grades move conventionally outward from self to family to community and nation. The civics and history strands note national symbols, holidays, and a smattering of historical individuals. The history strand emphasizes concepts of change over time, particularly on the local level. Grade 3 invokes links between community, state, and nation but without any U.S. History specifics. Finally, grade 4 is meant to cover “Nebraska studies.” It notes a few historical documents and includes a list of various historical events from the Kansas-Nebraska Act to 9/11—but offers nothing approaching an outline.

Grade 5, identified as “U.S. Studies,” covers U.S. History from precontact indigenous cultures to the Constitution. A few foundational documents are mentioned under civics, as are “early American colonial governments” (without explanation). However, most of the meager and scattershot historical content is placed in the history strand—where the thematic organization of standards, indicators, and fixed Big Ideas makes any coherent content outline impossible. Each thematic item looks at the *entire* period from early indigenous cultures to the Constitution, considering continuity and change during that period; multiple perspectives on sources and events (“including marginalized and underrepresented groups”); the impact of people, events, ideas, and symbols on various cultures and groups; and evaluating sources to ask and answer questions. Some

fairly random historical specifics are mentioned as suggested examples, but they are split between the Big Ideas, without a hint of chronology or context.

After grades 6 and 7 tackle “World Studies,” grade 8 resumes “United States History” (no longer “Studies”). The course is meant to recap the nation’s “Colonial foundations” and cover the time period from the Constitution to the Gilded Age. However, although the indicators include more specific examples than those in grade 5, the thematic structure is identical—and, thus, unsuccessful. The civics strand mentions various laws and amendments affecting rights of various groups and invokes some historical specifics as examples of impactful decisions (it also wrongly offers “Federalists and Anti-Federalists” as its sole example of political parties, which they were not). The standards in the history strand are again entirely thematic, looking at the impact of events, examining historical context from multiple perspectives, assessing primary sources, learning how differing experiences can lead to different perspectives, learning how marginalized groups might understand historical events, and so forth. The suggested examples mention more historical events than in grade 5, but only in a handful of fragmentary lists under the thematic indicators. Colonial America is recapped mainly by mentioning “Colonial America” in the longest of these lists. “John Deere” is given the same weight as the Civil War. Historical outlining remains nonexistent.

High School

High school U.S. History is meant to complete the sequence by covering everything from the Progressive era to the present (though in the absence of an actual course, it’s not clear how). The introductory summary stresses the need to go “beyond simply asking ‘what happened when?’” It does not, however, acknowledge that asking “what happened when?” is an essential step before going beyond. To analyze history, one must actually *learn* the history. Like earlier grades, the high school course offers almost nothing toward that end.

Again, districts and teachers are offered purely thematic standards and indicators under the same fixed set of Big Ideas. Indicators invoke causes and effects of historical events; interpreting key events in chronological order (though chronological outlining itself is completely

eschewed); the impact of people, events, and ideas; the appreciation of multiple perspectives; the impact of differing experiences on perspective; and so forth. The suggested examples attempt a few isolated interpretive questions, such as, “To which conditions were Progressives responding?” But as in previous grades, most of the limited specifics can be found in the lists of examples housed under the thematic indicators. Eleven of those examples cover “key national events” from Progressivism to contemporary America, with the world wars, women’s suffrage, Depression, Cold War, and Civil Rights era cropping up along the way. Some other fragmentary examples note various expansions of rights, governmental measures, and advocacy movements affecting minority groups.

That’s it. Even at the high school level, there is no attempt to provide any kind of historical outline.

Strengths & Weaknesses of the Nebraska U.S. History Standards

Strengths

1. The standards include fairly good history-related skills expectations, despite an unfortunate lack of emphasis on written presentation of research.

Weaknesses

1. Nebraska’s standards largely fail to offer any substantive U.S. History outlining, leaving teachers and districts almost entirely without content guidance.
2. Nebraska covers U.S. History once, in a single pass during grade 5, grade 8, and high school, thus relegating the pre-Constitutional period to grade 5.
3. The standards’ rigid thematic organization would undermine coherent outlining, if any were attempted.

Skills Development

Two of the four “Big Ideas” in history—“Historical Analysis and Interpretation” and “Historical Inquiry and Research”—are skills focused, as are most of the individual indicators under the other two Big Ideas.

Primary and secondary sources, and their use in research, are introduced in grade 2, applied to local/neighborhood history. Historical primary documents are specifically invoked beginning in grade 4, with students told to contrast multiple sources and compare their perspectives. Emphasis on researching information to formulate questions and communicate conclusions gradually builds across the elementary grades. In middle school, students are asked to evaluate sources for perspective and historical context. High school skills are similar except for small upgrades in aims (for example, students are asked to evaluate the “limitations” and “accuracy” of sources). High school students are also asked to synthesize research and communicate conclusions within historical context. However, as in many states, there is little specific reference to producing written results.

Clarity and Organization: 1/3

As discussed in the Civics section of this review, Nebraska’s social studies standards are generally readable and usable, but their structural rigidity undermines coherent presentation of material.

U.S. History scope and sequence are barely defined in early grades. Grade 3 is apparently meant to evoke historical themes in connection with Nebraska and the U.S., but no historical specifics are mentioned. The U.S. History sequence across grade 5, grade 8, and high school is reasonably clear (though inherently flawed, as it relegates the Colonial period to fifth grade and leaves events such as World War II more or less untouched until high school). However, detail is so thin and outlining so negligible that scope is hard to discern, although the intended timespan for each part of the course is noted in the title and/or introductory paragraph.

Recommendations

Civics

1. **Reorganize the content into a larger number of more specific indicators** instead of lumping huge topics into laundry lists along with far less important points.
2. **Ensure that any “examples” are well chosen.**

U.S. History

1. **Provide substantive U.S. History content outlining to promote shared exposure to essential content.**
2. **Offer two full passes through U.S. History** (one in the elementary grades and a second in higher grades).

Both subjects

1. **Make the organizational structure more flexible** and responsive to the requirements of the specific content that each grade is meant to cover.
2. **Specifically require that high school students take at least one year of U.S. History and at least one semester of Civics** and organize the high school content accordingly.

Documents Reviewed

- “Nebraska Social Studies Standards,” 2019, <https://cdn.education.ne.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Nebraska-Social-Studies-Standards-Final-11-2019.pdf>

ENDNOTES

1. Because reviewers had discretion to add a “+” or “-” to a state’s letter grade, some states earned slightly different grades despite receiving identical scores.
1. <https://nebraskalegislature.gov/laws/statutes.php?statute=79-724>

Nevada

A	Exemplary	10
	Standards worthy of implementation	9
B	Good	8
	Targeted revisions recommended	7
C	Mediocre	6
	Significant revisions strongly recommended	5
D	Inadequate	4
F	Complete revision recommended before implementation	3
		2
		0-1

Civics: D

Content & Rigor: 2/7

Clarity & Organization: 1/3

Total Score: 3/10

U.S. History: F

Content & Rigor: 1/7

Clarity & Organization: 1/3

Total Score: 2/10

Overview

Nevada’s civics and U.S. History standards are inadequate. The biggest problems are the general dearth of specific content and the needlessly rigid organizational approach. A complete revision is recommended.

Description of the Standards

Nevada’s social studies standards provide grade-level outlines for K–5 and subject-specific course outlines for 6–8 and high school. Each grade or course opens with a short introduction, followed by a table that aligns “disciplinary skills” categories with more specific “disciplinary skill standards.” A second table aligns “content themes” with more specific “content standards.” The themes are divided between five strands: history, civics, geography, economics, and “multicultural” (a sixth “financial literacy” strand is added in some grades and courses). Each strand is assigned a fixed set of themes that may or may not appear in a given grade or course. For civics, the themes are “civic and political institutions”; “civic dispositions and democratic principles”; and “processes, rules, and laws.” For history, the themes are “civic and political institutions”, “civic dispositions and democratic principles”, and “processes, rules, and laws.” For history, they are “power and politics”, “identity”, “people and ideas”, “Nevada history”, and “international relations.”

Civics: D

In Brief

Patches of useful content are largely obscured by uselessly broad and vague expectations and a needlessly rigid approach to organization.

Content and Rigor: 2/7

K-8

Nevada's K-8 standards are vague, and concepts are frequently introduced without the proper foundation.

The problems begin in Kindergarten, where students are asked to "describe how people work to improve their communities" (SS.K.16). This lack of detail and scope is the norm for Nevada. For example, a standard for grade 2 suggests that students "determine the civic dispositions and democratic principles that have influenced the U.S." (SS.2.18), though there is also a more concrete standard about the role and responsibilities of the president.

Notably, one grade 3 history standard (SS.3.11) asks students to "investigate government responses to migration and immigration." Yet students have not yet studied any branch of government other than the federal executive branch, and in any event, how the U.S. government has handled immigration seems beyond the grasp of most third graders. Similarly, grade 4 has a standard about interest groups, but because neither the concept of elections nor the legislative branch has been introduced, it's hard to see how fully this idea can be explored (if indeed it can be explored by ten-year-olds).

In practice, students with sufficiently skilled and knowledgeable teachers may get a lot of civics in grade 5, which focuses on the first third of U.S. History. The standards for this grade cover the development of political parties (in history), unspecified foundational documents, the debates that shaped the U.S. Constitution, the structure of the U.S. government, checks and balances, the Bill of Rights, and how rights have continued to expand. Yet all of this is addressed in very broad language. For example, students are expected to "analyze core civic dispositions and democratic principles

and their influence on early American history" (SS.5.22) and "describe how the nation changed in the past and continues to change in order to limit and/or protect individual rights" (SS.5.27).

The civics expectations for the middle school "World Civilizations" course include describing and comparing "the different political, civil, religious, and economic organization of early civilizations" (SS.6-8.EWC.23). Yet incredibly, no specific civilizations are identified. This stunning lack of detail and scope continues in "World Geography and Global Studies," where students study the "rise and fall of governmental systems and political developments across the world" (SS.6-8.WGGS.1); "the roles of political, civil, and economic organizations in shaping people's lives" (SS.6-8.WGGS.24); and "the origins, purposes, and impacts of laws, treaties, and international agreements" (SS.6-8.WGGS.26). All this is so cosmic and vague as to be essentially useless on the ground.

A final course on "Early U.S. History and Civic Ideals" focuses on the second third of U.S. History, from the Constitution through "the early twentieth century," but it is scattershot. It includes concepts like "representative government," "the evolution of laws," and "the struggle for greater civils rights and liberties" (in the "multicultural" strand). One history standard touches on international relations. Another unhelpfully asks students to "describe the different political, civil, religious, and economic organizations throughout U.S. history" (SS.6-8.EUSH.31). Finally, one civics standard suggests that students "compare a current national issue to a historical event from early U.S. History in order to propose a solution based upon past outcomes" (SS.6-8.EUSH.33). Without a comprehensive walk through of the three branches of government, federalism, or the electoral process, that assignment may prove difficult for many students.

High School

In general, the high school standards are short on details, though they do manage to check off many major content boxes by catchphrase and allusion. For example, one standard mentions the rule of law in passing, while another covers "the roles and responsibilities" of all three branches of government. Yet there is no further exploration of the executive branch, the Constitution's status as a higher law, or the Supreme Court's role in interpreting it (though a standard on due process is notably substantive and clear.)

Meanwhile, some crucial terminology is missing or misused. For example, there are vague standards about the evolution of civil rights that don't mention equal protection, as well as broad standards about civic action that don't explicitly refer to speech, assembly, or voting. One standard suggests that students analyze the "legislative process" involved in the creation of regulations (SS.9-12.CE.29). Another seems to address federalism but wrongly implies that the U.S. Constitution establishes the power of local governments (SS.9-12.CE.32). And the only standard discussing the electoral process makes no mention of primaries, the Electoral College, or campaign finance (SS.9-12.CE.31).

Other standards address the evolving interpretation of founding documents, international relations, comparative government, and majority rule vs. minority rights, but none of them says very much. Finally, one standard suggests that students "evaluate policies enacted by the government to meet the needs of various social and economic groups in the U.S." (SS.9-12.CE.17). Without further guidance, it is impossible to know what Nevada's standards writers had in mind.

Strengths & Weaknesses of the Nevada Civics Standards

Strengths

1. The skills associated with the high school "Civics and Economics" course are sensible.

Weaknesses

1. Many standards are too vague to provide any useful guidance.
2. Some essential content is missing (e.g., judicial review, the Civil War Amendments, and the basics of comparative government).
3. Some standards call for students to analyze concepts without proper foundation, especially in elementary school.

Skills and Dispositions

Nevada includes a set of disciplinary skills for each grade, including one that deals with "taking informed action." In grades K–8, there are two activities linked to this skill: brainstorming individual actions to solve a problem (at the community, state, national, or global level, depending on what students are studying in a particular grade) and using deliberative and democratic procedures to take action. However, without a bit more detail and direction, it's hard to say how useful these activities will be (throughout grades K–5, there are references to "civic dispositions" and "democratic principles" but no discussion of what these might be).

In contrast, the disciplinary skills associated with the high school "Civics and Economics" course are reasonably clear and useful, focusing on assessing the credibility of sources, seeking out multiple sources to "revise or strengthen claims," understanding and critiquing multiple viewpoints, and evaluating counterclaims and evidentiary weaknesses. High school students also are expected to "analyze and evaluate current issues, major legislation, and policies in Nevada politics" (SS.9-12.CE.18).

Finally, many of the multicultural standards emphasize respect for individual differences, how individuals have helped change society, and the importance of making a positive impact on one's community. However, like the standards in general, these expectations would be more useful if they were more specific.

Clarity and Organization: 1/3

In general, Nevada's social studies standards document is usable. The tables for each grade or course are reasonably clear; target skills are laid out in a consistent and readable manner; and content strands are color coded and easily identified. However, the strict adherence to the various strands and themes is a major barrier to logical organization and often results in less important information receiving disproportionate space. The high school "Civics and Economics" course in particular suffers from this rigid approach. For example, gerrymandering and redistricting are housed under geography instead of with other elections-related concepts, and the imperative of coming up with a standard for every theme means the multicultural standards for the high school course are somewhat repetitive.

U.S. History: F

In Brief

Nevada's U.S. History standards consist of a handful of overbroad concepts scattered across a rigid set of thematic categories. A flawed U.S. History sequence is specified but never detailed.

Content and Rigor: 1/7

K-8

Nevada's standards declare social studies "the foundation of our republic." They also insist on "a student-centered approach ... in which critical thinking and inquiry are the focus, rather than rote memorization of facts," with "recall of information" downplayed in favor of "a growth mindset and a natural curiosity." Unfortunately, as is too often the case in social studies, a rejection of "rote memorization" is used to justify a near-total rejection of factual content.

Grades K-2 look outward from community to nation. Kindergarten and first grade briefly invoke concepts of change over time. Grade 2 includes general references to unspecified major leaders, significant events, marginalized and oppressed groups, and internal migration. Grade 3 looks at migration around the world. Grade 4 turns to Nevada history, with vague references to Nevada's evolution over time and role in the U.S. but nothing that remotely resembles an actual content outline.

Grade 5 turns to U.S. History, though lack of detail again leaves the scope unclear. The introductory paragraph mentions European exploration and colonization; the intersection of Native, European, and African cultures; and the Declaration of Independence, Constitution, and Bill of Rights. Historical content, insofar as it exists, is scattered among the "content themes." For example, the expectation that students "examine the development of political parties in American history" (SS.5.11) appears in the history strand under "power and politics." However, invocations of diverse groups fall under "identity," and the influence of "various political, religious, and intellectual ideas" (SS.5.15) is the sort of thing one encounters in "people and ideas." Finally,

the "causes and effects of the American Revolution" appear under "international relations." The multiculturalism strand, of course, focuses on diversity, oppression, and fights for equality. However, there are no historical specifics and no hints of chronological outlining.

The U.S. History sequence continues with "Early U.S. History & Civic Ideals," one of the subject-specific courses in the 6-8 grade band. The short introduction indicates that the course may be assigned for two semesters (in which case it runs from the Revolution through the Industrial Revolution) or for three (in which case it covers everything from the Revolution through WWII). Different outlines are *not* provided for these different possible endpoints, and the content standards remain hopelessly broad and scattered almost randomly among themes. There are passing, context-free references to Native communities, westward migration, slavery, diversity, and so on. But references to the Trail of Tears and Great Migration in the geography strand and to the Louisiana Purchase, slave trade, and Reconstruction under the economics strand are as close to specifics as the standards ever get. The expectation that students "analyze the influence of political, social, cultural, economic, religious, geographic, intellectual, and artistic changes throughout the course of U.S. history" (SS.6-8.EUSH.17) is, unfortunately, typical.

High School

The high school course completes the U.S. History sequence (such as it is) and is explicitly labeled "1877-Present." The introduction urges teachers to follow "a chronological as well as thematic approach, thus avoiding the tendency to teach the content as a checklist of facts to be covered." Yet there seems to be little risk of that, as the standards provide no facts whatsoever.

The closest the outline comes to chronological history is a short list of "suggested topics and concepts" in the introduction, including "but not limited to: Gilded Age/Industrial Revolution, Nativism/Populism, Closing of the Frontier, Imperialism, Progressivism, WWI, 1920s, Great Depression, WWII, Civil Rights Movement, Cold War, Rights Movements of the 1970s, Globalism, Terrorism and Modern Issues." The actual Content Standards—again split among the same five strands and their subsidiary "content themes"—remain nebulous, invoking concepts such as

“diverse ideologies,” “individuals and reform movements,” “American identity,” “gender roles,” “socioeconomic diversity,” “religious, intellectual, and artistic changes,” “migration and immigration patterns,” as well as diversity, oppression, and technological change.

Almost nothing in the two-page outline mentions any specific history, let alone offers a coherent chronological outline of essential historical knowledge. “Suffragettes,” “Civil Rights activists,” and “progressives” are mentioned as possible examples in a standard asking students to “interpret events from a variety of historical and cultural perspectives” (SS.9-12.US.16). “Landmark Supreme Court cases” are mentioned under the civics strand, but none is named, let alone explained.

Strengths & Weaknesses of the Nevada U.S. History Standards

Strengths

1. There is a reasonably strong focus on analytical skills.

Weaknesses

1. The standards are nearly devoid of specific history.
2. The U.S. History sequence is flawed, relegating the crucial Colonial era to grade 5.
3. The rigid organizational approach scatters related content across multiple themes and strands.

Skills Development

The content outline for each grade or course is preceded by a section on disciplinary skill standards, which are divided, in every grade and/or course, into six categories: compelling questions, supporting questions, using sources, developing claims, communicating conclusions, and taking “informed action.” Early grade skills standards emphasize “prompting and support” but introduce primary sources (focused at first on the school or local community). By grade 2, students are to analyze primary sources for the authors’ perspectives, time period, and intent, which feels like a reach for seven-year-olds. By grade 3, primary and secondary sources are contrasted, along with concepts of corroboration and comparison of sources. Later grades emphasize the same basic skills, while urging students to use wider ranges of sources, detect inconsistencies, develop claims and counterclaims, and so forth. However, there is almost no emphasis, even at the high school level, on *written* presentation.

Clarity and Organization: 1/3

As noted in the civics portion of this review, Nevada’s social studies standards document is seriously undermined by its inflexible thematic organization, which effectively rules out any meaningful, chronologically structured historical outlining.

Based on the information provided, it’s clear that U.S. History is to be covered only once, across grades 5, 6–8, and 9–12 (meaning that the Colonial period is inevitably relegated to grade 5). However, the near-total lack of detail makes it hard to tell where the grade 5 course is meant to end. Furthermore, because the middle school course may run either two or three semesters (from the American Revolution to either “the Industrial Revolution” or WWII), it may or may not overlap with high school U.S. History, which at least has a clearly identified timespan.

Recommendations

Civics

1. **Add specific examples wherever possible to provide some sense of scope.**
2. **Ensure that each branch of government is covered in appropriate depth.**
3. **Bolster the high school Civics course** (e.g., by adding standards on judicial review, the growth of the executive branch, federalism, equal protection, primary elections, and comparative politics).

U.S. History

1. **Prioritize factual knowledge** of U.S. History, alongside skills and concepts.
2. **Improve the U.S. History sequence** by offering a full introduction to U.S. History in elementary grades and a full survey in more advanced grades.

Both subjects

1. **Let the content dictate the organization** instead of forcing all manner of content into the same “content themes” and strands.
2. **Provide more specific guidance in all grade levels.**

Documents Reviewed

- “Nevada Academic Content Standards for Social Studies,” 2018, http://www.doe.nv.gov/uploadedFiles/nde.doe.nv.gov/content/Standards_Instructional_Support/Nevada_Academic_Standards/Social_Studies/NVACSforSocialStudies.pdf

Revisions to the Nevada social studies standards are currently underway.

New Hampshire

A	Exemplary	10
	Standards worthy of implementation	9
B	Good	8
	Targeted revisions recommended	7
C	Mediocre	6
	Significant revisions strongly recommended	5
D	Inadequate	4
F	Complete revision recommended before implementation	3
		2
		0-1

Civics: F

Content & Rigor: 1/7
Clarity & Organization: 1/3
Total Score: 2/10

U.S. History: F

Content & Rigor: 1/7
Clarity & Organization: 1/3
Total Score: 2/10

Overview

New Hampshire’s civics and U.S. History standards are inadequate. Instead of providing substantive content guidance, they offer vague generalities punctuated by seemingly random examples. A complete revision is recommended before implementation.

Description of the Standards

New Hampshire’s social studies standards document features a “themes/strands grid” that links ten themes to five content strands: civics, economics, geography, U.S. History, and world history. This is followed by a “themes/social science grid” that links the aforementioned themes to concepts from anthropology, archaeology, sociology, and psychology. Another section defines “essential skills for social studies,” which are followed by “grade-span expectations” for the K-4, 5-8, and 9-12 grade bands. Each of these bands has thematic content standards, which are supplied with “expectations” for somewhat narrower grade bands (K-2, 3-4, 5-6, 7-8, and 9-12); relevant themes are noted parenthetically with each expectation.

Civics: F

In Brief

New Hampshire’s civics standards are vague, broad, and incomplete. Where details are provided, it’s unclear why those particular examples were chosen, as there are no obvious connections between them.

Content and Rigor: 1/7

K–8

New Hampshire’s civics standards are frustratingly vague. For example, the expectations for grades K–2 indicate that students will study national symbols (but which symbols?), the purposes of state and national government (but which purposes?), how public officials are chosen (which officials?), and the responsibilities of community members (who remain nameless). Some expectations are so poorly written or nebulous as to be inscrutable. For example, K–2 students are to “compare the rules to the classroom and school to the rules of the United States system of government” (SS:CV:2:1.1). Yet there is no indication that K–2 students have been taught enough to meet this highly ambiguous expectation (even if the obvious typo were to be fixed).

In general, the expectations for grades 3–4 are more concrete. For example, students are expected to know the three branches of the federal government, the organization of the state government, the rights outlined in the U.S. and New Hampshire constitutions, and how laws are made at the state and local levels. However, they are also expected to “analyze how government addresses social, political, and geographic issues—e.g., local land-use decisions or decisions involving human rights” (SS:CV:4:1.2). What are teachers to make of the two examples in this standard?

In grades 5–6, the expectations mention the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights (as well as “individual rights” and “equal protection”). Yet all of these terms appear as examples rather than as the main content of the expectations. And other expectations about comparative government and the political, legal, and philosophical origins of American democracy provide

inadequate guidance, as does the expectation that students “describe ways in which countries interact with each other culturally, economically, diplomatically, or militarily” (SS:CV:6:3.2).

Grades 7–8 have similar deficiencies, citing terms such as direct democracy, representative government, and minority rights without elaborating. The most straightforward expectations for these grades concern how laws are made and the services provided by state and national governments. However, students are also expected to “describe ways in which particular events and documents contributed to the evolution of American government” (SS:CV:8:2.3), which is less than helpful.

Notably, the grade 5–8 economics content delves deeper into the government’s role in the economy with some reasonably good detail—tariffs, ways that income can be redistributed, and the role of economics in international diplomacy. Similarly, the U.S. History content for grades 5–8 mentions the “foundations of American democracy,” tensions between state and national governments, the evolution of voting rights, and New Hampshire’s role in presidential primaries and elections. It would be reassuring to know that the topics covered in economics and U.S. History were being linked to civics content, but that work is apparently left to schools and teachers.

High School

At the high school level, New Hampshire has fourteen broad, brief, and sometimes baffling civics expectations. To wit, students are expected to “identify the structures and functions of government at various levels, e.g., county—role of the sheriff’s office—or nation—role of providing the defense of the country” (SS:CV:12:1.1). Unfortunately, the structure of this expectation—a truly cosmic topic followed by two very specific but seemingly random examples—is representative. And other high school expectations are all over the map, covering (in very general terms) how laws are made, applied, and enforced; the roles of custom, law, and consent of the governed; “fundamental ideals and principles”; the evolution of the Constitution, individual rights, domestic, and foreign policy; and the United States’ contributions to democracy.

Notably, one standard focuses on the role of the judiciary, but there are no separate standards for the legislative and

executive branches (though all three branches are mentioned *within* the aforementioned standard). And there is no discernible coverage of elections, political parties, equal protection, or comparative government (nor is it clear if Federalism is covered by the expectation that students know the “structures and functions of government”).

As in lower grades, it’s the economics strand that discusses the role of government in the economy, while U.S. History addresses political parties, religion, federalism, foreign policy, and economic policy. The world history strand contains some comparative politics. But all these topics are approached through the lenses of other disciplines, meaning they aren’t necessarily linked to the mechanics of modern government or the realities of twenty-first-century citizenship. For example, the mere fact that students have studied the Whig Party doesn’t mean they understand current party primary rules.

Skills and Dispositions

The three-page section on “essential skills for social studies” includes some skills that are essential to effective citizenship. These include the media-literacy fundamentals such as selecting trustworthy sources; distinguishing between fact, interpretation, and opinion; and recognizing authorial bias and propaganda. In addition to these skills, New Hampshire also wants its students to recognize situations where civic action is required and have the capacity to persuade, debate, negotiate, and compromise. However, though these are all worthwhile endeavors, there is no guidance as to when or how these skills should be taught.

Similarly, New Hampshire’s fourth civics standard touches on dispositions, but the expectations are very general—discuss community responsibilities, evaluate characteristics that promote good citizenship, and describe how citizens can participate in civic and political life. It’s great that New Hampshire recognizes the importance of civic dispositions, but it needs more rigorous coverage.

Clarity and Organization: 1/3

New Hampshire’s failure to provide meaningful content guidance for any grade or course makes any discussion of readability moot, and the gratuitous piling of themes upon skills upon strands isn’t very user-friendly.

Strengths & Weaknesses of the New Hampshire Civics Standards

Strengths

1. The germ of good skills development for civics can be found in the “essential skills for social studies.”

Weaknesses

1. The extraordinarily broad expectations are sprinkled with examples that raise more questions than they answer.
2. There are no specific expectations for any individual grade level.
3. Locating civics content in the economics and U.S. History strands obscures the big picture and could lead to coverage that neglects the civics aspects of these topics.

U.S. History: F

In Brief

New Hampshire’s social studies standards don’t define a U.S. History sequence and offer no applicable guidance for teaching U.S. History—only broad conceptual pointers illustrated with examples that appear to be plucked randomly from the entire span of U.S. History.

Content and Rigor: 1/7

K-8

New Hampshire rejects any attempt at substantive or chronological outlining. Its social studies standards are purely thematic and conceptual. The state wants students to engage in “higher-order thinking,” but specific content

about which to think is never defined. The U.S. History strand declares that “effective study of history must focus on broad themes, important concepts, major issues, and significant movements, rather than a lengthy and fragmented list of people, places, events, and other facts.” But it is deeply ironic to see substantive outlining dismissed as “fragmented” when New Hampshire’s own standards fracture history into rigid and arbitrary categories without the slightest respect for facts, time, or context.

The U.S./New Hampshire history strand is divided into the same five standards in every grade band: political foundations and development; contacts, exchanges, and international relations; world views and value systems and their intellectual and artistic expressions; economic systems and technology; and social/cultural. What random and scattered specifics do appear within these thematic standards are mentioned in passing, stripped of all context, and used only to illustrate entirely conceptual expectations.

There is no hint of any U.S. History sequence through grade 4—only invocation of broad themes such as national symbols and documents, “the interconnectedness of the world” (SS:HI:4:2:1), idealistic individuals, the arts and literature of various groups, and the importance of technology. Paired examples are often drawn from wildly different eras, such as the American Revolution and the 9/11 attacks (for the impact of major events).

Presumably, New Hampshire expects U.S. History to be taught somewhere in the 5–6 and 7–8 bands, but scope and sequence are impossible to discern. The jumble of thematic expectations in grade band 5–6 contains some passing references to actual history, again often pairing examples from completely different eras. Bare references to the rise of self-government under the “political foundations and development” standard are further marred by hints at the largely mythical claims of direct Iroquois influence on early American government. Examples in the 7–8 grade band range chronologically from the First Great Awakening to the 1981 Air Traffic Controllers’ strike. One item on state and national authority offers the 1832 nullification crisis and 1960s school integration as examples. Another, on foreign policy, pairs the XYZ Affair and Vietnam. A single specifically substantive item—“Explain major attempts to force European powers to recognize and respect the sovereignty of the United States

as a new nation, e.g., the Jay Treaty or the War of 1812” (SS:HI:8:2.1)—feels like an intruder from another educational planet.

High School

The U.S. History strand for grades 9–12 is indistinguishable from that of earlier grades in its approach. Once again, there is no indication as to how the various strands are meant to be taught—as individual courses or concurrently. The scope of U.S. History is again completely undefined, save for the random hints of content in the expectations’ examples.

The thematic expectations invoke broad issues such as the rise and fall of political parties (with the Whigs and Progressives as examples), the influence of religion (separation of church and state in early New Hampshire is paired with the Moral Majority), Federalism (the Articles of Confederation vs. the New Deal), sectionalism and national crises (the Hartford Convention vs. *Brown v. Board of Education*), and so on. Similar themes include foreign policy,

Strengths & Weaknesses of the New Hampshire U.S. History Standards

Strengths

1. Important history-related skills are identified in the skills standards.

Weaknesses

1. No U.S. History sequence is defined.
2. No substantive U.S. History content guidance is offered at any level.
3. Scattered examples from all eras are tossed together, seemingly at random.
4. History-related skills are outlined, but they aren’t attached to any particular grade band or differentiated and developed as the grade level increases.

expansionism, Manifest Destiny, international organizations, ideas, arts, sciences, and American global influences (with the Bill of Rights and popular music paired as examples). For five broad expectations on economic development, the paired examples include mercantilism and NAFTA. Finally, the social/cultural expectations touch on pluralism, gender, diversity, class, and concepts of morality—with examples that pair abolitionism with the abortion debate and Antebellum southerners with Eleanor Roosevelt.

Like the standards for earlier grade bands, the standards for high school don't include any actual history—only broad concepts.

Skills Development

As noted in the Civics portion of the review, the New Hampshire standards include a section on “essential skills for social studies.” Commendably, the skills specified therein include finding information, assessing the most trustworthy sources, distinguishing between primary and secondary sources, understanding cause and effect, recognizing authorial bias, distinguishing fact from opinion, and citing sources. However, though these skills are indeed essential, no attempt is made to identify age-appropriate skills development. According to the document, “It is the responsibility of local curriculum committees to assign specific skills to particular grade levels.”

Clarity and Organization: 1/3

As noted under the Civics section, some parts of the New Hampshire standards document are readable. However, this is of only marginal value when there is almost nothing useful to read.

U.S. History scope and sequence are simply nonexistent. There is no suggestion of what content is to be taught when. And the only hints of content are the examples attached to the expectations, which jump randomly across time. Nothing is offered that might help teachers structure a course, and there is nothing to suggest students across the state will share exposure to essential content.

Recommendations

Civics

1. **Reorganize the high school standards** (e.g., by giving each branch of government its own, discrete, nuanced standard).
2. **Ensure that topics such as Federalism, elections, political parties, and comparative government are covered in high school civics** (e.g., by giving each of these topics its own discrete civics standard).

U.S. History

1. **Aim for two full U.S. History sequences: one at the K-8 level and the other in high school.**

Both Subjects

1. **Clearly specify the content that students should learn in each individual grade level (K-8) as well as the relevant high school courses.**
2. **Provide much more substantive and detailed guidance at every level.**
3. **Improve the examples.**

Documents Reviewed

- “K-12 Social Studies New Hampshire Curriculum Framework,” 2006, <https://www.education.nh.gov/sites/g/files/ehbemt326/files/inline-documents/standards-socialstudies-framework.pdf?2>

Revisions to the New Hampshire social studies standards are currently underway.

New Jersey

A	Exemplary	10
	Standards worthy of implementation	9
B	Good	8
	Targeted revisions recommended	7
C	Mediocre	6
	Significant revisions strongly recommended	5
D	Inadequate	4
	Complete revision recommended before implementation	3
F		2
		0-1

Civics: C

Content & Rigor: 4/7

Clarity & Organization: 1/3

Total Score: 5/10

U.S. History: C

Content & Rigor: 4/7

Clarity & Organization: 1/3

Total Score: 5/10

Overview

New Jersey's new civics and U.S. History standards are mediocre. Strong standards on "active citizenship" are overshadowed by jumbled chronology and the state's decision to embed most high school civics in a two-year U.S. History sequence rather than a separate civics course. Significant revisions are strongly recommended.

Description of the Standards

New Jersey's social studies standards offer content outlines for grade bands K-2, 3-5, 6-8, and 9-12. The elementary bands are assigned the same overarching label ("U.S. History: America in the World") and divided into four strands: civics, government, and human rights; geography, people, and the environment; economics, innovation, and technology; and history, culture, and perspectives. Each of these strands is subdivided into substrands (or "disciplinary concepts"), which are supplied with grade-band-specific "core ideas" and subsidiary "performance expectations" (an introductory chart also lists skills-focused "social studies practices" that apply to all grade levels).

After grade 5, the standards are divided between U.S. History and world history, and the core ideas and performance expectations are organized into broad

historical eras (e.g., “the twentieth century since 1945”). However, within these eras, expectations are still organized thematically—in part because New Jersey has embedded most high school civics content in a required, two-year course in U.S. History instead of offering a separate course in civics and/or U.S. government.

A final section, offering standards for “active citizenship in the twenty-first century” for each of the four grade bands, focuses on civic skills and dispositions.

Civics: C

In Brief

Despite some thoughtful content, New Jersey’s decision to embed most high school civics content within a two-year U.S. History sequence carries significant risks for both subjects. An unusually compelling set of “active citizenship” standards has potential, but to realize the vision embodied in these standards, the state needs a *bona fide* high school civics course.

Content and Rigor: 4/7

K–8

Because New Jersey’s “active citizenship” standard is mostly about skills, substantive coverage of civics is primarily found in the “civics, government, and human rights” strand of the state’s U.S. History standard (though relevant material can also be found in other strands within U.S. History and in World History).

At the K–2 level, students are expected to understand what a government is, the roles of local leaders, the services provided by local government, why rules advance the common good, why rules and laws should respect individual rights, and the importance of civic virtue. Yet some individual standards don’t provide clear guidance. For example, students are expected to understand “what makes a good rule or law” (6.1.2.CivicsPR.1)—an incredibly difficult question with no obvious answer—as well as “how individuals work with different levels of government to

make rules” (6.1.2.CivicsPI.3), which may or may not be a call for students to know about the legislative branch and the differences between local, state, and federal governments.

From a civics perspective, the pace accelerates in grades 3–5, although there’s an odd disconnect between the civics content for these grades (which focuses on the Constitution and the Bill of Rights) and the Colonial focus of the U.S. History (see the U.S. History portion of this review)—and here, too, several standards are vague or hopelessly cosmic. For example, students are expected to “explain how government functions at the local, county, and state level,” (6.1.5.CivicsPI.5) in addition to comparing and contrasting “responses of individuals and groups, past and present, to violations of fundamental rights” (6.1.5.CivicsDP.2).

Fortunately, other standards for grades 3–5 are stronger. For example, the structure of U.S. government is covered by three reasonably solid indicators—one on the three branches of government, one on how state and federal governments share power, and one on “how the United States Constitution defines and limits the power of government.” Similarly, representative government at the local, state, and national levels receives two strong indicators, and a standard on the rights in the Constitution and Bill of Rights is admirably specific (if somewhat overburdened). And there are some relatively straightforward indicators about how Civil Rights leaders were catalysts for change and how political and business leaders promote human rights, among other topics.

In contrast to grades 3–5 and high school (see below), the focus of the middle school standards does seem to be on U.S. History rather than civics, as such. For example, the topic of electoral process is addressed only in the context of specific historical episodes. And the following expectation crams at least ten crucial concepts into a single set of parentheses:

Evaluate the effectiveness of the fundamental principles of the Constitution (i.e., consent of the governed, rule of law, federalism, limited government, separation of powers, checks and balances, and individual rights) in establishing a federal government that allows for growth and change over time” (6.1.8.CivicsPI.3.b).

Unfortunately, this expectation is as close as New Jersey comes to reviewing the structure and powers of the branches of the national government after grade 5.

Other reasonably solid standards mention the Declaration of Independence, Articles of Confederation, and Alien and Sedition Acts (though not in that order), as well as the expansion of voting rights during the Jackson Administration and the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments. Finally, some additional civics material for middle schoolers can be found in the World History/Global Studies standard, where three admirably clear and explicit expectations ask students to compare the legal systems of classical civilizations (e.g., Babylon and Israel) to the current U.S. legal system, explain the influence of Athenian democracy and the Roman Republic on the U.S. Constitution, and “cite evidence of the influence of medieval English legal and constitutional practices on modern democratic thought and institutions (i.e., the Magna Carta, parliament, the development of habeas corpus, and an independent judiciary).”

High School

Because New Jersey doesn’t require a separate high school civics course, such civics content as can be found at the high school level is again concentrated in the U.S. History standard (and, to a lesser extent, in the standards on “active citizenship” and world history). Like the middle school standards, this means that most of the high school standards have a historical lens. For example, the first civics expectation within the U.S. History standard deals with how the colonies “adapted the British governance structure to fit their ideas... about individual rights and participatory government” (6.1.12.CivicsPI.1.a). However, some of the civics expectations explicitly encompass the present. For example, an expectation on political parties asks for comparisons to today’s political parties (though students have yet to learn anything about them). Similarly, a standard on judicial review in the republic’s formative period asks students to assess the Supreme Court’s “continuing impact,” which may be difficult when they have yet to encounter any twentieth-century U.S. History (6.1.12.CivicsPR.2.a). As these examples suggest, New Jersey’s standards aim very high, yet its attempts to incorporate civics into its U.S. History sequence are imperiled by the assumption that core civics concepts can be picked up by osmosis (though of course, sufficiently skilled educators may be able to overcome this challenge).

Meanwhile, specifics are patchy. For example, the first half of U.S. History makes no mention of the major Supreme Court cases of the day (e.g., *Marbury v. Madison*, *McCullough*

v. Maryland, *Gibbons v. Ogden*, or *Dred Scott v. Sandford*). Fortunately, there is some improvement in the second half of the course. For example, in the unit on “Progressive reforms,” students learn about the Nineteenth Amendment and *Plessy v. Ferguson* (6.1.12.CivicsDP.6.b). Similarly, one World War I expectation mentions the Espionage Act (6.1.12.CivicsDP.7.a), while a World War II standard alludes to Japanese internment but doesn’t mention *Korematsu* (6.1.12.CivicsDP.11.a). Finally, a section on “civil rights and social change” mentions most of the important legislation, as well as *Brown v. Board of Education* and *Roe v. Wade*.

The U.S. History course closes with three sections on domestic policies, international policies, and “global society” since 1970. Between them, these sections have a total of eleven civics expectations, most of which are housed under “domestic policy” and nearly all of which are a frustrating

Strengths & Weaknesses of the New Jersey Civics Standards

Strengths

1. The elementary standards provide strong coverage of the basics of the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, and other founding documents.
2. In the right hands, the fusion of civics and U.S. History in the two-year high school course could produce deeper insights.
3. The “active citizenship” standards are an unapologetic call to arms.

Weaknesses

1. There is no roadmap for a standalone civics class in high school.
2. Many topics need more explicit and systematic coverage at the high school level.
3. Some indicators are too broad to provide much useful direction.

mix of thoughtful direction and vague or overly general execution. For example, one standard asks students to “use case studies and evidence to evaluate the effectiveness of the checks and balances system in preventing one branch of national government from usurping too much power during contemporary times” (6.1.12.CivicsPI.14.b), yet no specific “cases” are suggested. The same criticism applies with greater force to a standard that asks students to “analyze how the Supreme Court has interpreted the Constitution to define and expand individual rights and use evidence to document the long-term impact of these decisions” (6.1.12.CivicsPI.14.c). Other expectations address the fall of communism, the role of diplomacy, and the impact of technology on civic participation and other issues (e.g., privacy and intellectual property)—all worthy content, assuming that students have already absorbed the nuts and bolts.

But have they?

In principle, nothing prevents teachers or textbook writers from laying the necessary groundwork at various intervals throughout the course. Yet this is hardly guaranteed. Rule of law and due process merit just one parenthetical reference apiece at the high school level. There are no specific references to equal protection or federalism, nor is there any specific coverage of the amendment process or the nuts and bolts of elections. What’s more, there isn’t any systematic overview of structure of the three branches of the federal government, their respective powers, or the manner in which their leaders are elected, appointed, and removed. Perhaps coverage of this content is implicit in other expectations, but it would be better if it were explicit.

Skills and Dispositions

New Jersey is serious about cultivating the skills and dispositions that are essential to informed citizenship. Throughout the U.S. History standards, indicators on “civic mindedness” ask students to reflect on leadership qualities, respect for others, and how people can change their communities and world. For example, students in elementary school are expected to “identify the types of behaviors that promote collaboration and problem solving with others who have different perspectives” (CivicsCM.3). By the time students are asked to consider strategies for boosting youth turnout, “evaluate the effectiveness and fairness of the processes by which local, state, and national officials

are elected” (6.1.12.CivicsPI.14.a), and “determine the effectiveness of the federal government in addressing health care, income equality, and immigration,” the illusion that the two-year high school sequence is a pure U.S. History course has been punctured (6.1.12.CivicsPI.14.d).

In addition to those standards, New Jersey also has an “active citizenship” standard that puts greater emphasis on participation and advocacy. To wit, the two indicators for the early grades suggest that students “bring awareness of a local issue to school and/or community members and make recommendations for change” and the standard has an intentional focus on climate change (6.3.2.CivicsPD.1). For instance, the five indicators for grades 3–5 include three references to climate change, though they also suggest that students propose a solution to a local problem “after considering evidence and the perspectives of different groups, including community members and local officials” (6.3.5.CivicsPD.3), while the *nineteen* indicators for grades 6–8 ask (among other things) that students “propose and defend a position regarding a public policy issue at the appropriate local, state, or national level.” Finally, the high school “active citizenship” standards suggest that students “develop a plan for public accountability and transparency in government related to a particular issue(s) and share the plan with appropriate government officials” (6.3.12.CivicsPD.1).

In addition to meeting these expectations, middle school students are expected to participate in simulated government hearings and deliberate on issues from upcoming elections, and the high school standards include more mock hearings and meetings. Pedagogically speaking, many of these activities have merit. But because they aren’t embedded in any specific grade or course, it is hard to shake the sense that nobody in particular is responsible for helping students simulate an IMF meeting.

Clarity and Organization: 1/3

As noted, New Jersey doesn’t have a separate high school civics course—a condition that drastically raises the stakes (from a civics perspective) of what is nominally a two-year course in U.S. History. On the plus side, the fusion of civics and history at the high school level may give students an unusually deep understanding of how America’s democratic institutions and traditions have evolved over time. Yet

there are considerable risks, both from a civics perspective and from a U.S. History perspective (see the U.S. History portion of this review). First, it's not clear that topics like the structure of the executive branch or federalism will ever be covered systematically. And second, it's hard to say if civics as a subject will ever coalesce.

At a minimum, more nuts-and-bolts civics standards should be added to the high school history course to address these concerns. Alternatively, the U.S. History course could be compressed into three semesters that focus more clearly on U.S. History in order to make room for a semester of civics and/or U.S. Government—or the state could simply require a semester of civics in addition to its two-year U.S. History sequence. Finally, if the state is serious about active citizenship, then it should at least consider embedding these expectations in specific courses or grade levels.

U.S. History: C

In Brief

New Jersey's U.S. History standards sometimes contain the raw elements of a useable outline, especially at the high school level. But erratic detail, lack of explanation, and jumbled organization badly undermine substance, coherence, and chronology.

Content and Rigor: 4/7

K–8

Even though the overarching label for the K–2 and 3–5 grade bands is “U.S. History: America in the World,” the history strand and its four substrands appear at the end of the outlines for each band. Furthermore, even for the grade levels in question, the K–2 band includes little specific history. Symbols and monuments are mentioned under civics, and cultural regions are mentioned under geography (both without examples). But the history strand only discusses broad concepts of chronology, sources, and argument.

The 3–5 grade band goes further. For example, the history strand makes passing references to Native American

cultures; slavery and indentured servitude; power struggles between European countries; the impact of African, European, and Native American belief systems; “the roles of freedom and participatory government in various North American colonies”; a handful of founding documents; and the impact of demographics on opportunity in the Colonial period. However, these general references are split between the thematic substrands and core ideas, which focus more on analysis than substance (e.g., using multiple sources to investigate differing perspectives about a topic).

Matters improve slightly in the 6–8 grade band, where broad historical eras replace strands and substrands. However, within these eras, content is still badly fragmented by the purely conceptual and/or skills-focused core ideas. Within the U.S. History half of the middle school standards, the focus is the period from 1754 to 1877 (the vague references to early America in grades 3–5 were apparently meant to be the state's first pass through the Colonial era). Accordingly, the 1754–1820s era opens with civics, geography, and economics expectations discussing the Constitution and Constitutional Convention, the Alien and Sedition Acts, and issues of national ideals, slavery, and national debt, before history expectations jump back to the 1750s, broadly noting changes in British policy and unspecified American reactions, forward to political parties, back to the Articles of Confederation, back again to the Declaration and various groups in the Revolution and the impact of the Treaty of Paris on Native American relations, and forward once more to a vague reference to George Washington's impact.

Similar organizational muddles afflict subsequent eras. For example, the 1801–61 outline jumps from Jacksonian democracy to reform movements, expansionist conflict with Native Americans, economic debates, the Louisiana purchase, the impact of technological change on social status, foreign tariffs and treaties, resistance to slavery, Manifest Destiny, and immigration (all of which are mentioned more than discussed). And the expectations for the final 1850–1877 era are even less specific than those for previous eras. For example, coverage of the sectional breach is limited to two expectations that suggest students “prioritize the causes and events that led to the Civil War from different perspectives” (6.1.8.HistoryCC.5.a) and “construct an argument that prioritizes the causes and events that led to the Civil War using multiple sources from different perspectives” (6.1.8.HistoryCC.5.g). Similar items mention the impact of the Civil War, the effectiveness of the

Reconstruction amendments, the roles of various groups in the war, the Emancipation Proclamation and Gettysburg address, “various factors” in the course and outcome of the war, different approaches to Reconstruction (Congress, Lincoln, and Johnson are at least mentioned by name), and the economic impact of Reconstruction. Finally, the era’s brief introductory statement lists slavery *after* “political, economic, and social issues” as a cause of the Civil War.

High School

The high school standards cover the full sweep of American history, from 1585 to the present, and the outline is several times longer than the one for middle school. Furthermore, state requirements indicate that this content is meant to be a two-year course covering U.S. and New Jersey history (though the standards never specify duration, and New Jersey specifics are only occasionally mentioned).

Unfortunately, despite these underlying strengths, explanatory depth remains highly erratic, and content within eras continues to be fragmented between the strand-based, thematic core ideas. To wit, coverage of the Colonial period is brief, though it at least mentions the adaptation of British governmental traditions to the colonies, participatory government, regional economies (which aren’t further explicated), and Native American relations. However, slavery’s establishment is not mentioned, and very little is explained.

Also, thematic organization badly undercuts the 1754–1820s era, which jumps from Constitutional principles to ratification debates, judicial review, disputes over the western expansion of slavery, early national economic policy, the intellectual roots of the founding documents, diverse perspectives in the Revolution, later battles over Constitutional ideals, and so on. Similarly, standards for subsequent eras mention party politics and the Supreme Court (though not the Marshall Court or Jacksonian democracy specifically), along with some specific reform movements, western expansion, technological development, nullification and the Missouri and 1850 compromises, and cultural change—but, again, thematic organization fragments related topics and detail is erratic. For example, other than the Amistad case, there are no specifics on the antislavery movement, let alone an explanation of free-soil ideology. Finally, the Reconstruction amendments are mentioned before the standards jump back to scattered

factors in the secession crisis and broad thematic references to demographic, geographic, economic, and political causes and effects of Civil War and Reconstruction.

Coverage of the Gilded Age is brief and broad, thematically noting westward expansion, urbanization, immigration, the labor movement, and public education but with few specifics. The rise of Jim Crow and African American rights organizations is mentioned, but coverage of the Progressive movement is very thin. WWI propaganda and restrictions on civil liberties are noted, but the Spanish-American war is not. Detail is sometimes adequate for the 1920s, Depression, and New Deal. However, there are many gaps, and organization remains chaotic. Similarly, WWII coverage is patchy, though the standards do mention economic and social developments on the home front and some details of international relations. The Cold War era mentions McCarthyism, the Space Race, and various conflicts in no particular order and with little sense of context. “Civil rights and social change” from the 1950s to the 1970s are

Strengths & Weaknesses of the New Jersey U.S. History Standards

Strengths

1. Some of New Jersey’s U.S. History standards include meaningful content, especially at the high school level.

Weaknesses

1. Content coverage is patchy, especially in grades K–8.
2. Organization is confusing, rigid, and overly thematic.
3. No twentieth-century content is covered before high school.
4. Because content isn’t associated with any specific grade level, it’s not clear what should be taught when (or for how long).

bundled together, with erratic detail glancing at civil rights legislation and activism, suburbanization, environmentalism, consumerism and economic policy, women in society, and cultural trends—doing little justice to any of them.

Finally, three final sections on domestic policy, international policy, and global society from 1970 to the present devote unusual space to recent decades. However, coverage is exceptionally broad and conceptual, with almost no specifics (for example, the domestic section mentions conflicting views on major issues but not Reagan or the New Right). And from a historical perspective, organization remains deeply confused.

Skills Development

The thematically organized content expectations frequently ask students to “draw from multiple perspectives,” “use primary sources representing multiple sources,” or “use data and other evidence” to approach content (though this approach tends to draw focus away from the already jumbled content itself without cogently explaining target skills). Similarly, the core ideas focus on analytical skills, with later grade bands invoking the relevance and validity of sources. However, the ideas that focus on chronological concepts seem unambitious by later grades, as do those that focus on argumentation, which say little more than that students should use multiple sources to make reasoned arguments and say nothing whatsoever about written presentation.

In addition to the indirect coverage provided by the content outlines, a table on Social Studies Practices focuses more directly on research skills, such as framing questions, finding primary and secondary sources and assessing their reliability and perspective, and developing claims. But the various subsections tend towards repetition, and they apply to all grades, making no attempt to develop skills over time.

Clarity and Organization: 1/3

New Jersey’s social studies standards are an organizational sinkhole. Early grades are arranged in a confused proliferation of strands and substrands, with the often-vague content further splintered between thematic core ideas. Even in later grades, where content is arranged by era, expectations remain rigidly tied to the thematic, strand-based core ideas, leading to chronologically jumbled,

repetitive, and—at times—almost incoherent coverage. Organization by grade band further confuses matters, as the inadequately specific expectations theoretically apply to multiple grades, making it even less clear what should be taught when (or for how long).

Furthermore, although the U.S. History sequence appears to begin with the Colonial period in grades 3–5, that is never explicitly stated, and such content as the band offers is fractured amidst the welter of strands and substrands (scope does become clear in the 6–8 and 9–12 bands, where era titles explicitly define chronological range). Finally, the overarching sequence is, frankly, a bit odd. Although high school theoretically covers the full sweep of U.S. History, grades 3–8 only cover through 1877, meaning that even basic twentieth-century content may not be encountered until high school. And although the state requirements indicate that U.S. and New Jersey history is intended as a two-year course, the standards themselves never indicate how long the course should run or where in the 9–12 grade band it might be placed.

Recommendations

Civics

1. **Provide more explicit, systematic, and specific coverage of core civics topics at the high school level**, including but not limited to the structure and powers of the three branches of government, federalism, the Bill of Rights, electoral process, and comparative politics.
2. **Incorporate the “active citizenship” expectations for twelfth grade into the relevant high school courses** (i.e., U.S. History, World History, or a separate course in civics/U.S. Government).

U.S. History

1. **Strengthen substantive content coverage by plugging the serious gaps in the current outlines.**
2. **Dispense with core ideas and arrange content chronologically.**

Both subjects

1. Offer a suggested grade-level sequence for each grade band.
2. Specifically require at least one semester of high school civics in addition to two years of U.S. History or as part of a two-year course in U.S. History and Civics.

Documents Reviewed

- New Jersey Student Learning Standards for Social Studies, 2020, <https://www.nj.gov/education/cccs/2020/2020%20NJSL-SS.pdf>

New Mexico

A	Exemplary	10
	Standards worthy of implementation	9
B	Good	8
	Targeted revisions recommended	7
C	Mediocre	6
	Significant revisions strongly recommended	5
D	Inadequate	4
	Complete revision recommended before implementation	3
F		2
		0-1

Civics: C

Content & Rigor: 4/7

Clarity & Organization: 1/3

Total Score: 5/10

U.S. History:¹ C-

Content & Rigor: 4/7

Clarity & Organization: 1/3

Total Score: 5/10

Overview

New Mexico's civics standards are mediocre, and its U.S. History standards are inadequate. Scattershot and shallow content in both subjects is compounded by needlessly confusing organization. Significant revisions are strongly recommended.

Description of the Standards

New Mexico's social studies standards are divided into three documents for grades K-4, 5-8, and 9-12. Each document is divided into four strands: history, geography, civics and government, and economics. Each strand is defined by a single, all-encompassing "content standard," which is broken down into more specific "benchmarks," including a "skills" benchmark for history.² These are supplied with one or more "performance standards" for each grade in the K-4 and 5-8 documents and for the entire 9-12 high school grade band. Subject-specific courses are not defined in the 9-12 document, which uses the same four strands as the K-4 and 5-8 documents, and there is no introductory material, so it's not clear how the extant standards (which appear to have been written in 2009) are meant to map to the states' current course requirements.³

Civics: C

In Brief

New Mexico’s social studies standards provide basic coverage of most core civics concepts; however, there is little detail, and the manner in which the standards are organized makes them hard to use.

Content and Rigor: 4/7

K-8

A single, all-encompassing content standard applies to the whole of K–12 civics. It reads, “Students understand the ideals, rights, and responsibilities of citizenship and understand the content and history of the founding documents of the United States with particular emphasis on the United States and New Mexico constitutions and how governments function at local, state, tribal, and national levels.” In Kindergarten and grade 1, that goal translates to learning national and state symbols and identifying leaders and the importance of rules. Second graders are to learn the (undefined) purposes of government and the difference between direct democracy and a representative democracy. Third graders are to learn the basic structure and functions of local government, give examples of the public good, and “describe how the majority protects the rights of the minority”—taken as a truism rather than an ideal. They are also expected to “explain how rules/laws are made and compare different processes used by local, state, tribal, and national governments to determine rules/laws” (K-4.3-C.3.2). Nebulousness aside, this aggressive standard seems premature given that grade 4 focuses on state government and grade 5 on national government.

Through the lens of New Mexico’s government, grade 4 examines majority rule, minority rights, and the public good, but the standards don’t elaborate on any of these subjects (or provide examples from the state’s history). Fifth graders are to identify and describe various symbols, landmarks, and essential documents, including “declaration of independence; United States constitution; bill of rights; the federalist papers; Washington, D.C.; liberty bell; Gettysburg address; statue of liberty; government to government accords; treaty of

Guadalupe Hildago; Gadsden purchase” (5-8.3-A.5.3). Instead of a laundry list that puts the Liberty Bell and the entire Bill of Rights on equal footing, it would be better to develop multiple standards that highlight the key concepts and purposes reflected in the essential documents (although the three branches of government do get their own standard).

Grade 6 draws civics lessons from the Greeks and Romans via several broad standards that aim high (e.g., “Describe the concept of democracy as developed by the Greeks and compare the evolution of democracies throughout the world”) (5-8.3-A.6.1). New Mexico’s government then gets a second, slightly deeper pass in grade 7, which covers topics such as the initiative and referendum process, the criminal justice system, elections, the legislative process, and how the state government interacts with its local, tribal, and federal counterparts. Similarly, grade 8 includes a somewhat deeper treatment of the federal government, with references to the separation of powers, federalism, limited government, key rights from Constitutional amendments, and judicial review.

In addition to these structural elements, eighth graders also dive into relevant history and political philosophy by assessing the importance of John Locke, Magna Carta, and the Federalist Papers. The grade 8 history strand also covers the Constitutional Convention and early political parties in adequate detail for civics purposes and introduces the Civil War Amendments. As in earlier grades, the organization and presentation leave something to be desired. But assuming the bulk of this worthwhile civics content can be covered in the final year of middle school, students will be well prepared for more rigorous civics content in high school.

High School

The high school standards are a curious mix of lofty aims and inadequate detail (e.g., “Compare and contrast the characteristics of representative government” [9-12.3-C.10]) and overstuffed expectations such as the following:

Analyze the rights, protections, limits and freedoms included within the United States constitution and bill of rights, to include: constitutional mandates such as the right of habeas corpus, no bill of attainder and the prohibition of the ex post facto laws; 1st Amendment guarantees freedom of religion, speech, press, assembly, and petition; 4th, 5th and 6th Amendments address search and seizure, rights of the accused, right to a fair and speedy trial, and other legal protections; 14th

Amendment protection of due process and equal protection under the law; conflicts which occur between rights, including tensions between the right to a fair trial and freedom of the press and between majority rule and individual rights; expansion of voting rights, limitation of presidential terms, etc. (9-12.3-A.5).

There's a happy medium to be found between these approaches, but New Mexico rarely finds it. Because of several everything-but-the-kitchen-sink standards such as the one above, the state puts most essential civics content on the radar but only in passing. Federalism is alluded to but not addressed with any detail. Ditto for political parties and how the United States interacts with other nations. The evolution of voting rights is covered in the history strand, and the role of government in the economy is addressed in the economics strand—where links to the civics content are effectively obscured. Meanwhile, an entire standard is devoted to comparing the courts of Henry II of England to the courts of today.

Giving each big concept its own discrete standard would have numerous benefits, including but not limited to creating enough breathing room for major subtopics to be examined. For example, because New Mexico rightly gives each branch of the federal government its own standard, the elements

of the judicial branch that high school students are to study include “specific powers delegated by the Constitution in Article III and described in the federalist papers, Numbers 78–83; checks and balances; judicial review as developed in *Marbury v. Madison*; [and] issues raised in *McCulloch v. Maryland*” (912.3-A.4).

In addition to these organizational issues, there are a few gaps in coverage at the high school level. Specifically, there is no mention of federalism, and the suggestion that students track the presidential campaign (though sensible for students who happen to take civics in an election year) leaves a great deal on the cutting room floor—including redistricting, gerrymandering, campaign-finance law, voter access policies, and potential alternatives to closed primaries and “first past the post.”

Skills and Dispositions

Benchmark 3-D in the civics strand is devoted to citizenship and civic participation. For example, Kindergarten students are expected to “explain what is meant by good citizenship.” Third graders “explain the significance and process of voting.” Seventh graders “explain the obligations and responsibilities of citizenship (e.g., the obligations of upholding the constitution, obeying the law, paying taxes, [and] jury duty)” and “explain the roles of citizens in political decision-making (e.g., voting, petitioning public officials, [and] analyzing issues).” Finally, high school students “demonstrate the skills needed to participate in government at all levels,” including the ability to “analyze public issues and the political system; evaluate candidates and their positions; [and] debate current issues.” Though not always compelling, this emphasis on civic participation is consistent across grade levels. However, the benchmark would be stronger if it included a focus on media literacy and the explicit expectation that students do a deep, research-based dive on at least one issue or policy that captures their interest, with the goal of applying their knowledge of government and history.

Strengths & Weaknesses of the New Mexico Civics Standards

Strengths

1. New Mexico references a significant amount of core content in middle school and high school.
2. There is a commendable emphasis on civic participation in most grade levels.

Weaknesses

1. The standards are poorly organized.
2. There is little supplemental detail.
3. There is almost no coverage of federalism or the electoral process at the high school level.

Clarity and Organization: 1/3

New Mexico's decision to organize content by grade band and benchmark makes it needlessly difficult to assemble the content for any particular grade level. Moreover, the intended themes for the various grades are never explained (though, in most cases, they can be inferred from the

contents of the standards). And it is entirely unclear whether the various high school strands are meant to represent separate courses.

As noted, the amount of content assigned to specific standards is also wildly uneven, and essential and less essential content also receives equal weight within the standards that include long lists of topics. Meanwhile, other standards that are so broad that their scope and content are difficult to discern.

Finally, New Mexico's failure to capitalize proper nouns such as Bill of Rights is annoying and indicative of the state's seemingly rushed approach.

U.S. History: C-

In Brief

New Mexico offer a single course in U.S. History across fifth grade, eighth grade, and high school. But coverage is patchy, organization is unhelpful, and there are a few outright errors.

Content and Rigor: 4/7

K-8

In every grade band, the history strand has four benchmarks: New Mexico, United States, world, and skills. However, the number of performance standards housed within each of these benchmarks varies considerably, with the "United States" and "world" benchmarks getting considerably more standards, especially in higher grades.

At the K-4 level, the history strand for the entire grade band is barely one page, and the United States benchmark contains only a short sentence or two for each grade. Grades K-2 glance at unspecified community leaders, a few specific national holidays and symbols, and "a diversity of individuals and groups," respectively. In the grade 3 U.S. benchmark, students then "describe local events and their connections to state history," but no specific examples of this are provided. Finally, fourth-grade students are to link local events to national history, but again there are no examples. The other benchmarks and strands add little historical substance.

Although it's never explained, it's clear from the contents of the performance standards that a single course in U.S. History is spread across grade 5, grade 8, and high school. Although the focus of each grade isn't specified, within the 5-8 document brief, U.S. History content outlines are provided for grades 5 and 8, along with scattered U.S. History items that are linked to world history in grade 6 and New Mexico history in grade 7.

In general, coverage is thin. For example, the grade 5 outline offers just six short performance standards for the entire Colonial period, moving briskly through the (unspecified) motives for European exploration, a better item on the motives for colonization, a list of six historical documents (strangely including the much-later Gettysburg Address), contact between Indians and settlers, the introduction of slavery, and the rise of representative government, where the standard wrongly lists Iroquois influence. (Although the Iroquois system is sometimes claimed to have influenced later inter-colonial union efforts, any link is at best exaggerated; yet the claim reappears twice in the New Mexico Civics standards, once in grade 8 and once in high school.)

After a year of world history in grade 6 and rather fragmentary coverage of New Mexico history in grade 7, the U.S. History sequence resumes in grade 8, which covers the Revolution through Reconstruction. Within the U.S. History benchmark, there are eight standards for the grade, each with lettered subheadings that allow for somewhat greater specificity than in previous grades. Yet the outline is still rushed, and there are errors. (For example, British attempts to regulate colonial trade are wrongly offered as the reason for colonial resistance to British tax acts, rather than taxation without representation.) The outline mentions the Articles of Confederation and Constitutional Convention but adds little detail. A reference to precedents set by the Washington presidency is welcome, but the outline jumps almost at once to Jacksonian democracy, antebellum reform movements, and western expansion. Coverage of the sectional crisis is brief, but it does note slavery in the territories as a key factor. Finally, the standards on Civil War and Reconstruction again note some important points, including the Reconstruction amendments, but explain little about their content or context. The civics strand adds a smattering of additional specifics on early American political development.

High School

The high school U.S. History outline attempts to cover everything from Reconstruction to the present in nine standards. However, although a greater number of lettered subheadings make this the longest outline yet, it is still barely over a page. Furthermore, the time periods in the standards are consistently listed without corresponding dates (e.g., “Analyze the United States’ expanding role in the world during the late 19th and 20th centuries”).

Again, detail is erratic. Coverage of the post-Civil War industrial revolution offers a checklist, touching on economic growth, monopolies, urbanism, immigration, the labor movement, Populism, Progressivism, and so on. Coverage of U.S. global expansion is rushed, unhelpfully alluding to unspecified “events that led to the United States’ involvement in World War I” (9-12.1-B.3.c). The 1920s section mentions prohibition, the Scopes trial, and mass culture, but incorrectly pushes the postwar Red Scare into the 1920s

and leaves out such cultural phenomena as the Harlem Renaissance (though there is an obscure reference to “the rise of youth culture in the ‘jazz age’”). Finally, coverage of the Depression and New Deal tries to pack key points into a few words and consequently misses a good deal, and the World War II section is similarly compacted, thus failing to mention Japanese internment (among other items).

All Civil Rights developments from Reconstruction onwards are grouped together in the next section, with the result that the Reconstruction amendments and rise of Jim Crow appear after World War II. *Plessy v. Ferguson* is lumped together with *Brown v. Board of Education* and *Roe v. Wade*. The Nineteenth and Twenty-Fourth Amendments are lumped in with the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts, after which the standards jump all the way to the Equal Rights Amendment before looping back to post-WWII developments, including the emergence of the Cold War, growing U.S. influence, the U.N., containment and the Truman Doctrine, the Red Scare and McCarthyism, proxy conflicts with the USSR, the space race, the “image of 1950s affluent society” (9-12.1-B.7.h), and then—rather suddenly—Vietnam protests and the 1960s counterculture.

The occasionally adequate high school outline collapses completely after the 1960s. Apart from the passing references to *Roe v. Wade* and the Equal Rights Amendment under Civil Rights, the 1970s and 1980s—including but not limited to Nixon, Watergate, and the rise of Reagan and the New Right—are totally absent. Instead of addressing these events, the outline jumps to brief references to the end of the Cold War, the changing global order, technology and the information age, and a final general item on U.S. History as “a framework for knowledge and skills within which to understand the complexity of the human experience” (9-12.1-B.9).

Skills Development

The “skills” benchmark in the history strand includes specific standards for each grade K–8 and for grades 9–12 as a unit. Skills items for grades K–4 are brief and basic, focusing on concepts of chronology, information from multiple sources, and unspecified methods of historians. However, they are considerably expanded in the grade 5–8 block and succeed in pointing to essential research and analytical skills. Primary and secondary sources (oddly including “computer software”) and research resources are introduced

Strengths & Weaknesses of the New Mexico U.S. History Standards

Strengths

1. In many places, New Mexico provides a basic checklist of important U.S. History content.
2. The wording of individual standards is reasonably clear and concise.

Weaknesses

1. Content outlining is often patchy, rushed, and lacking in detail.
2. Organizational flaws make it needlessly difficult to pull together the full content for each grade.
3. New Mexico offers a single U.S. History course across grade 5, grade 8, and high school, meaning the Colonial period is relegated to fifth grade and there is no coverage of the twentieth century until high school.

in grade 5, together with a brief reference to events in social context. Grade 6 notes different points of view about an issue or topic and identifying causal relationships in history. Grade 7 emphasizes an ability to examine history from the perspectives of the participants, and grade 8 asks students to integrate source research and pose historical questions. Finally, the skills standards for grades 9–12 again invoke primary and secondary sources, broadly note interpretive skills, ask students to identify authors’ opinions and biases, interpret events in context, and analyze the evolution of historical perspectives. There is hardly any emphasis on written presentation of research.

According to New Mexico’s social studies website, the social studies content standards in grades 6–12 are supplemented by the Common Core standards for literacy in science, social studies, and the technical subjects, a set of high-quality reading and writing standards for literacy in social studies that develop relevant analytical historical and citizenship skills. However, although the materials referred to have merit, particularly when it comes to their emphasis on written presentation of research, they are characterized as optional (and aren’t mentioned in the core standards documents).

Clarity and Organization: 1/3

Though never explicitly identified, U.S. History scope and sequence can be determined fairly easily from the U.S. benchmark in the history strand (which varies in quality but is clear enough to show the intended timespan). However, as discussed in the Civics section of this review, New Mexico’s decision to organize social studies content by grade band, strand, and benchmark makes it needlessly difficult to pull together all of the content for a given grade, and the high school document never explains whether the various strands comprise separate courses or are to be taught concurrently. Finally, the U.S. History sequence itself is flawed, relegating the Colonial period to grade 5 and providing no coverage of World War II and other basic twentieth-century events until high school.

Recommendations

Civics

1. **Ensure that major concepts get their own, discrete, nuanced standards** (e.g., due process, civil liberties, equal protection).
2. **Bolster the high school course** (e.g., by adding standards that specifically address federalism and the nuts and bolts of electoral process).
3. **Incorporate a focus on media literacy** into the middle school and high school standards.

U.S. History

1. **Expand and improve the U.S. History outlines** to provide more detail and explanatory depth.
2. **Make two full passes through U.S. History** (one in the early grades and a second in high school).

Both subjects

1. **Organize the standards by grade and/or course** rather than by grade band, strand, and multigrade benchmark.

Documents Reviewed

- “Social Studies Standards, Grades K–4,” 2009, https://webnew.ped.state.nm.us/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/SocialStudiesStandards_K-4.pdf
- “Social Studies Standards, Grades 5–8,” 2009, https://webnew.ped.state.nm.us/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/SocialStudiesStandards_5-8.pdf
- “Social Studies Standards, Grades 9–12,” 2009, https://webnew.ped.state.nm.us/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/SocialStudiesStandards_9-12.pdf

ENDNOTES

1. Because reviewers had discretion to add a “+” or “-” to a state’s letter grade, some states earned slightly different grades despite receiving identical scores.
2. The state’s website also indicates that the “New Mexico social studies content standards in grades 6–12 are supplemented by the Common Core standards for literacy in science, social studies, and the technical subjects” and links users to that external website.
3. According to the New Mexico High School Graduation Manual for the Class of 2022, students must obtain 3.5 social studies credits to graduate, including U.S. History and Geography; World History and Geography; U.S. Government (0.5 credits) and Economics (0.5 credits); and New Mexico History (0.5 credits). See https://webnew.ped.state.nm.us/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/2022-HS-Graduation-Manual_8.28.18-1.pdf.

Civics and U.S. History

New York

U.S. History	A	Exemplary	10
		Standards worthy of implementation	9
Civics	B	Good	8
		Targeted revisions recommended	7
C	C	Mediocre	6
		Significant revisions strongly recommended	5
D	D	Inadequate	4
		Complete revision recommended before implementation	3
F	F		
			0-1

Civics: B+

Content & Rigor: 6/7

Clarity & Organization: 2/3

Total Score: 8/10

U.S. History: A-

Content & Rigor: 6/7

Clarity & Organization: 3/3

Total Score: 9/10

Overview

New York’s civics standards are good, and its U.S. History standards are exemplary. Straightforward organization and rich content are the norm, with the exception of the high school civics standards, which are broader than the rest of the document. Targeted revisions are recommended.

Description of the Standards¹

The lengthy introduction to the “New York State K–12 Social Studies Framework” defines overall aims, structure, and grade-by-grade sequence. Individual outlines follow for grades K–12, including subject-specific courses assigned to specific grades. Each grade or course has a designated subject and is divided into “key ideas,” which are supplied with “conceptual understandings,” which are further defined by “content specifications.” K–8 grades and the 9–12 grade band are also supplied with “social studies practices” that define analytical and research skills. Finally, the document includes the CCSS-ELA standards for grades K–4 and the CCSS standards for literacy in history/social sciences for grades 5–8 and for the 9–10 and 11–12 grade bands.

Civics: B+

In Brief

New York’s K–8 civics standards are impressive, as is the eleventh-grade course on “U.S. History and Government.” But the standards for the twelfth-grade Civics course could be more specific and better organized, and the extensive skills standards are too much of a good thing.

Content and Rigor: 6/7

K–8

New York takes an aggressive but developmentally appropriate approach to K–8 civics. Along with the typical discussions of good citizenship and rules, the idea of local, state, and national governments appears in first grade and again in second grade in the context of voting and elections, while third grade introduces comparative government and the concept of universal human rights.

In fourth grade, civics is embedded in New York State history. Topics include governance in Native American tribes, ideas about political rights that led to the Revolution, and the requirements to become a U.S. citizen. Key idea 4.4 covers the basic structure of the federal government, how a bill becomes a law in New York, and rights and freedoms guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution, the New York State Constitution, and state laws. In the right hands, this could lead to a strong understanding of federalism at a relatively early grade level. However, some conceptual understanding items—such as the one about rights and freedoms—are vague.

In a similar vein, key idea 5.6 contains the bulk of the fifth-grade civics content. Appropriately, it revisits the structure of the federal government and suggests that students compare the U.S. government to the governments of Canada and Mexico. Students also examine the Declaration of Independence and U.S. Constitution, trace the history of at least one group that has struggled for equality and civil rights, and study multinational and nongovernmental organizations. This is all solid material, but it lacks detail. For example, students are expected to “examine the

foundational documents of the United States government for evidence of the country’s beliefs, values, and principles.” But the standards don’t say which beliefs, values, and principles New York deems essential.

Sixth grade turns to the Eastern hemisphere. However, although there is some reference to the governments of classical civilizations, civics is not a major feature. In contrast, seventh and eighth grade, which cover U.S. and New York history, offer significant civics coverage. Specifically, seventh grade includes Enlightenment ideas about natural rights and the social contract, the historical development of the Constitution (including unusually strong coverage of the Articles of Confederation and the compromises in the Constitutional Convention), and, crucially, “the Constitution in practice.” In addition to revisiting the separation of powers and checks and balances and providing noteworthy coverage of federalism, this key idea delves into topics rarely covered in K–8, such as the amendment process and foreign and domestic disputes that have tested the Constitution. Subsequent standards include specific references to *Marbury v. Madison*, the growth of suffrage among white men, and *Dred Scott v. Sanford*. Finally, eighth grade brings students all the way up to the present, while specifically addressing essentials such as the Civil War Amendments, poll taxes, *Plessy v. Ferguson*, women’s suffrage, and the Civil Rights movement (including *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* and the Civil Rights Act and Voting Rights Act), as well as subsequent judicial actions taken to protect individual rights (e.g., *Miranda v. Arizona* and *Tinker v. Des Moines School District*). Many items, such as the Espionage Act of 1917’s impact on civil liberties, Progressive Era legislation, and the war on terror, could be outstanding civics showcases in the hands of the right teacher.

High School

The eleventh grade course, “U.S. History and Government,” lives up to its name. Its treatment of Colonial political developments, British traditions, and Enlightenment ideas provides the necessary backdrop for understanding the U.S. Constitution. The weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation and the Constitutional Convention are revisited in even greater depth. At least twenty acts of Congress and no less than seventeen Supreme Court cases are specifically cited (e.g., *McCulloch v. Maryland*, *Gibbons v.*

Ogden, and *Gideon v. Wainwright*), and the Thirteenth through Nineteenth Amendments are all specifically called out.

During the march through history, students must think critically—for example, by comparing the presidential elections of 1800 and 2000 (11.2d) or examining the role of government in providing a social safety net (11.10c). In the second half of the course, connections to the present day become more obvious and explicit. Students are asked to evaluate “the constitutional challenge represented by ... court-packing effort” and examine “the congressional effort to limit presidential power through the War Powers Act.” A long list of efforts to “change ... American society” that includes the “modern women’s movement,” the environmental movement, and the LGBT movement is

followed by the expectation that students “thoroughly investigate” at least one of those efforts. Students are also asked to “compare and contrast” the policies of Johnson and Reagan and “examine the debates over the role of the government in providing a social safety net.” Finally, a unit on “the United States in a Globalizing World” considers topics such as the Patriot Act and globalization.

Compared to the rigor of the first eleven grades, the twelfth-grade course on “Participation in Civics and Government” is a mild disappointment. Unlike “U.S. History and Government” and all other preceding courses, there are no content specifications. Consequently, topics such as checks and balances, federalism, and rule of law are handled in extremely broad terms. For example, one conceptual understanding mentions “equality before the law and due process” but not the Fourteenth Amendment.

Consider the following conceptual understanding:

The Constitution created a unique political system that distributes powers and responsibilities among three different branches of government at the federal level and between state and federal governments. State constitutions address similar structures and responsibilities for their localities. (12.G1b)

This is a great start, but why not nail it down with a few more sub-bullets?

Notably, freedom of press receives its own conceptual understanding (in addition to another very broad conceptual understanding covering all First Amendment rights). Yet the Fourth and Sixth Amendments are nowhere to be found, nor is there any serious treatment of comparative government.

In short, the twelfth-grade standards cover a lot of important ground in ways that should point knowledgeable teachers in the right directions, but bolstering the allusions with specific, detailed guidance would be a gamechanger.

Skills and Dispositions

New York pays a lot of attention to skills and dispositions. At the K–8 level, the key ideas for each grade are preceded by Common Core learning standards and an additional set of social studies practices, which become more sophisticated as the grade level increases (though in some cases, there is almost no change). At the high school level, there is a

Strengths & Weaknesses of the New York Civics Standards

Strengths

1. The K–8 civics sequence is rigorous, with unusually good handling of federalism and three passes at the structure of the federal government.
2. The eleventh-grade course provides a rigorous introduction to the history of American government.
3. Civics and U.S. History are well integrated throughout the document.
4. There is a strong emphasis on civic skills and dispositions.

Weaknesses

1. Compared to the rest of the standards, the expectations for the twelfth-grade Civics course are rather broad.
2. The guidance provided by the fifth-grade civics standards is extremely broad.

U.S. History: A-

In Brief

New York's U.S. History content outlines are generally solid and sometimes exceptional, despite some avoidable gaps. Ideally, the standards for primary grades would provide a basic introduction to U.S. History content.

Content and Rigor: 6/7

K-8

The social studies standards for grades K-3 look gradually outwards from self to family to community. Though there is no history strand as such, strands on culture address basics such as national symbols, holidays, and cultural diversity, while the "time, continuity, and change" strand invokes differences between past and present, cause and effect, and basic types of sources. Grade 4 then turns to New York history, broadly outlining everything from Native American cultures through the Colonial and Revolutionary periods, nineteenth-century reform efforts, expansion/industrialization, and immigration/migration (though with little explanation).

After grades 5 and 6 introduce world history, grades 7 and 8 offer a two-year course in "History of the United States and New York State." Grade 7 covers the period from Native American cultures to the Civil War, with special emphasis on New York. Specific technological advances in European exploration are listed, yet a discussion of different Colonial regions never actually explains their differences. The entrenchment of slavery is broadly addressed, but the rise of self-government is not. The French and Indian War's role in spurring changes in British policy is discussed, but the Colonial reaction is mentioned rather than explained. Weakness in the Articles of Confederation and issues of the Constitutional Convention are explained, yet the political evolution of the early Republic receives only a passing glance. Westward expansion and the reform movements are treated in reasonable depth (though Jacksonian suffrage is oddly pushed into expansion). Coverage of the sectional schism is disappointingly brief, though the core issue of

single set of "practices" for all grades, plus the Common Core standards for the 9-10 and 11-12 grade bands. By the end of high school, students are expected to evaluate the sources of information, judge the strength of the evidence supporting a conclusion, recognize point of view, distinguish cause and correlation, and compose a reasoned argument on a matter of social importance. They are also expected to dialogue respectfully, participate in activities that "focus on a classroom, school, community, state, or national issue or problem," and "work to influence those in positions of power to strive for extensions of freedom, social justice, and human rights." Rightly understood, the expectations embodied in these standards do a good job of capturing the spirit of informed citizenship.

Clarity and Organization: 2/3

The K-8 civics standards are clear and well organized, with a solid progression across grade levels. Similarly, the "U.S. History and Government" course is clearly laid out. However, the decision to omit content specifications in the twelfth grade course means that some expectations are too broad or vague to provide much useful guidance, and organization is mediocre. For example, the entire section on "rights, responsibilities, and duties of citizenship" could safely be folded into "political and civic participation," and much of the "public policy" content—such as the observation that "each level of government has its own process of shaping, implementing, amending, and enforcing public policy" (12.G5a)—feels like it belongs in "foundations of American democracy" (with the exception of the conceptual understanding about how to be an effective media consumer, which also feels like it belongs in "political and civic participation").

As noted, there are charts for grades K-4, grades 5-8, and high school that articulate the progression of social studies practices and, beginning in grade 4, charts that indicate which key ideas contain which unifying themes. However, because this information is also indicated within the grades themselves, the grade-band information can feel duplicative and overwhelming rather than clarifying.

slavery in the territories is noted. Finally, varied regional perspectives are cited as causes of the Civil War, but the central role of slavery somehow is not.

Grade 8 continues the course to the present, beginning with a generally solid overview of Reconstruction and the destruction of African American rights. The interplay of technological change, immigration, and industrialization is briefly but cogently discussed and leads into often-detailed coverage of labor movements, political machines, anti-immigrant movements (jumping ahead chronologically to the 1920s), Populism, and Progressivism. Coverage of westward expansion, imperialism, and WWI is rushed, but includes notable details including the WWI crackdown on domestic dissent. The 1920s, the Great Depression, the New Deal, and WWII all need more space. The Cold War and its aftermath are covered briefly in a unit that touches upon recent policy before looping back to post-War domestic change, including the civil rights movement, social programs, and the rise of the New Right.

Ultimately, most essentials are noted across grades 7 and 8, but coverage is sometimes rushed, and explanatory detail is somewhat uneven.

High School

After grades 9 and 10 provide a second pass through world history, grade 11 offers “United States History and Government,” a second U.S. History survey covering from Colonial settlement to the present. Explanatory detail remains uneven, but is an improvement over middle school, and many sophisticated points are raised. To wit, the rise of slavery “as a racial institution” is specifically noted, as is the rise of Colonial self-government. However, much of the Colonial period is disappointingly skimpy, and the *reasons* for Colonial resistance to British taxation are not discussed. Although the Articles and the Constitutional Convention receive less attention than in grade 7, coverage of the early Republic—including the Washington presidency, the 1800 election, and the Marshall court—is notably improved.

Discussion of nationalism and expansion invokes standard points such as the Louisiana Purchase, Monroe Doctrine, and reform movements, as well as advanced issues such as the market revolution and Jackson’s conflict with the courts over presidential power. However, coverage of the antebellum

years is rushed, with most of the sectional crisis reduced to a list (albeit fairly complete) of events from 1820 to 1859. And although the outbreak of Civil War is now directly attributed to the schism over slavery, coverage of the conflict is very brief. Similarly, reconstruction and the rise of Jim Crow are handled briefly but adequately, and the failure of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth amendments to address women’s rights is correctly linked to the rise of the Women’s Suffrage movement.

Westward expansion and its consequences (including for Native Americans, Mexican Americans, and Chinese immigrants) lead into a somewhat rushed section on industrialization and urbanization up to 1920, including brief but substantive references to immigration, the labor movement, Populism, Progressive reforms, and early Civil Rights efforts. Coverage of American imperial expansion and WWI is similarly brief yet substantive, and coverage of the 1920s is strong (though the economic collapse and

Strengths & Weaknesses of the New York U.S. History Standards

Strengths

1. U.S. History content outlines are generally solid and sometimes exceptional.
2. New York offers two full U.S. History surveys: a two-year course across grades 7 and 8 and a second course in grade 11.
3. The framework puts impressive emphasis on history-related skills, including written presentation of research.

Weaknesses

1. No U.S. History is introduced in primary grades.
2. Though the tables and charts of skills and themes can be helpful, they can also be repetitious and confusing.

Hoover/FDR responses lack specifics). The discussion of the shift from isolationism to postwar internationalism and the roots of the Cold War is also strong. However, later events are problematically compressed and jumbled, with the end of the Cold War covered before postwar domestic issues and Vietnam tied rather awkwardly to Watergate. The Civil Rights movement and other reform efforts are well covered, but the postwar economic and demographic transformation are shortchanged. Finally, modern political developments are extremely rushed, jamming together the Great Society and the later Reagan response before jumping to the 2008 recession and recent political debates—then looping back to post-1990 foreign policy, terrorism, and globalization.

In short, the high school course covers most essential topics, and in some places, it is truly impressive. But there is still room for improvement.

Skills Development

New York’s social studies skills content is remarkably extensive, including not only the state’s own “social studies practices” for each grade or grade band but also integrated CCSS skills materials that address reading/research and writing/presentation skills. Even in early grades, students are encouraged to engage with informational texts, gather and interpret evidence, understand chronology and causation, compare/contextualize evidence, and produce written summations of findings. Primary and secondary sources are directly invoked in grade 1. By grade 8, they are expected to cite specific textual evidence from primary and secondary sources and identify bias, implicit ideas, context, and intended audience in sources. Finally, the state’s high school practices are similar to grade 8’s, but the CCSS reading and writing standards for history/social studies further expand on the use of textual evidence, authorial intent, and causation.

On balance, New York’s presentation of history-related skills is impressively ambitious and places commendable emphasis on written presentation along with reading and contextual analysis.

Clarity and Organization: 3/3

As discussed in the Civics portion of this review, New York’s framework documents are generally clear, well organized, and user-friendly. There are flaws, including duplicative charts of skills progressions and unifying themes, as well as an overly cumbersome introduction that makes the overall layout feel more confusing than it actually is. But these problems are outweighed by the clarity with which the core content is presented and the straightforward logic of the nested key ideas, conceptual understandings, and content specifications (a major flaw in the clarity and organization of the civics standards—the inexplicable decision to omit content specifications in the twelfth-grade Civics course—does not extend to the eleventh-grade U.S. History course).

The intended scope and sequence for U.S. History are admirably clear: Grade-level topics are identified in the introduction and in the title of each grade’s outline. High school courses are assigned to specific grades, making the timing and duration of each course unambiguous. Scope is indicated not only by course title but also by the extensive and generally specific content outlines themselves.

Recommendations

Civics

- 1. Add content specifications to the twelfth-grade course in Participation in Civics and Government** (similar to those that appear in other courses) and consider how the material might be reorganized.
- 2. Ensure that the twelfth-grade course addresses essential topics** such as comparative government, how the U.S. interacts with other nations, the Fourth and Sixth Amendments, and each of the three branches of government.
- 3. Provide additional details in fifth grade** (e.g., by specifying the most important “beliefs, values, and principles” in documents such as the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution).

U.S. History

1. **Improve the content outlines** to close the gaps, expand the rushed sections, and remove the thematic departures from chronology discussed in the review.
2. **Provide a basic introduction to U.S. History content in primary grades.**

Both subjects

1. **Streamline the charts of skills and themes** to avoid needlessly overwhelming redundancy.

Documents Reviewed

- “New York State K–12 Social Studies Framework,” 2015 (rev. 2017), <http://www.nysed.gov/curriculum-instruction/k-12-social-studies-framework>

ENDNOTES

1. A half dozen 2017 revisions to the grade 11 U.S. History course are listed in another PDF but have not been incorporated into the 9–12 framework document itself, which is still presented in its 2015 version (2016 revisions to the K–8 Framework are also listed in a separate document but have been incorporated into the main K–8 framework document).

North Carolina

A	Exemplary	10
	Standards worthy of implementation	9
B	Good	8
	Targeted revisions recommended	7
C	Mediocre	6
	Significant revisions strongly recommended	5
D	Inadequate	4
F	Complete revision recommended before implementation	3
		2
		0-1

Civics: D-

Content & Rigor: 2/7

Clarity & Organization: 1/3

Total Score: 3/10

U.S. History: F

Content & Rigor: 1/7

Clarity & Organization: 1/3

Total Score: 2/10

Overview

North Carolina's new civics and U.S. History standards are inadequate. Nebulous verbiage and an aversion to specifics make them functionally contentless in many places, and organization is poor throughout. A complete revision is recommended before implementation.

Description of the Standards

North Carolina's newly revised social studies standards offer outlines for each K-8 grade and for four high school subjects, including American History, World History, Civic Literacy, and Economics and Personal Finance. All individual grade and course outlines are divided between five "disciplinary" strands—behavioral science, civics and government, economics, geography, and history—each of which has at least one standard, plus a number of supposedly more detailed objectives. In addition to these content strands, every grade-level and course outline opens with "a content-neutral strand that focuses on the skills necessary for students to improve their critical thinking." This overarching "inquiry" strand and its associated indicators are divided by grade band (K-2, 3-5, 6-8, and 9-12).

Civics: D-

In Brief

Most of North Carolina’s civics and government standards are too broad, vague, or poorly worded to provide useful guidance to educators, and the manner in which they are organized is unhelpful.

Content and Rigor: 2/7

K-8

Each K-4 grade has one exceedingly broad standard for the civics and government strand and no more than four objectives, many of which are nearly as broad as the standards themselves. For example, grade 1’s single standard requires that students “understand how people engage with and participate in the community,” and one associated objective suggests that students “exemplify ways individuals and groups play a role in shaping communities” (1.C&G.1.1). Similarly, most of the objectives for grade 2 are vague and, in some cases, too sophisticated for the age range. For example, one objective suggests that students “summarize the role of government in protecting freedom and equality of individuals in America” (2.C&G.1.2). Finally, grades 3 and 4 target state and local government, but not in a way that is likely to promote understanding. For example, one third-grade standard vaguely suggests that students “compare the structure and function of both state and local government” (3.C&G.1.1), and one fourth-grade standard asks students to “summarize the ways in which women, indigenous, religious, and racial groups influence local and state government” (4.C&G.1.2). Before engaging in such summarization, students need to be systematically introduced to concepts such as voting, running for office, and lobbying.

Because it focuses on U.S. History, grade 5 should be a big year for civics. Yet the civics standards for this grade provide dubious guidance. Two broad standards and four objectives address the roles of the three branches “in terms of how the branches cooperate” and “work together,” as well as the (unspecified) ways in which (unspecified) individual rights are protected by the Constitution (which “ways” students are mysteriously expected to “exemplify”). But of course, one of

the main ways the Constitution seeks to protect individual rights is by separating the powers of government between rival institutions that are *unlikely* to cooperate and by creating a system of checks and balances that allows them to work *against* one another.

Like many other states, North Carolina devotes sixth and seventh grade to world history, making them a natural place to introduce the various forms of government through canonical examples such as Athenian democracy, the Roman republic, and the kingdoms of West Africa. Yet here, as elsewhere, the standards avoid specifics. Grade 6 has a single, amorphous standard on “the purpose of government and authority,” followed by six exceedingly broad objectives. The lone grade 7 standard addresses “modern governmental systems in terms of conflict and change,” with equally broad expectations such as, “Explain how the power and authority of various types of governments have created conflict that has led to change” (7C&G.1.1). Finally, grade 8 focuses on North Carolina History (though according to the standards, it’s expected that teachers will integrate national history). Here, again, the standards tease big concepts—“founding documents,” “democratic ideals,” and “societal reforms used to address discrimination”—but offer nothing concrete.

High School

The title of North Carolina’s high school civics course is Founding Principles of the United States of America and North Carolina: Civic Literacy. However, although the phrase “founding principles” appears repeatedly in the course’s objectives, the task of identifying those principles will apparently fall to individual districts and teachers. To wit, the first two “civics and government objectives require students to “explain” and “critique” the influence of unspecified “founding principles” on unspecified “state and federal decisions” and unspecified “federal policies, state policies, and Supreme Court decisions.” These are followed by four objectives on federalism, three objectives on “citizenship” that require students to “compare,” “summarize,” and “explain” vast bodies of vaguely-articulated content (e.g., “Summarize the changes in process, perception, and the interpretation of United States citizenship and naturalization”), and three objectives that touch on the two-party system, the relationship between media and government, and the “election process” (students are to “assess the effectiveness” of this process at the national, state, and local levels, but no additional

information is provided). Finally, six standards purport to deal with the “judicial, legal, and political systems” of the United States and again blithely ask students to evaluate huge swathes of history in one sweeping standard, including, “Assess how effective the American system of government has been in ensuring freedom, equality, and justice for all” (CL.C&G.4.4) and “Critique the extent to which women, indigenous, religious, racial, ability, and identity groups have had access to justice as established in the founding principles of government” (CL.C&G.4.6).

As that summary suggests, there is no rigorous march through the structure of the Constitution (though students are expected to “exemplify” how it has been interpreted). Nor is there a deep dive into the three branches of the federal government. Indeed, the executive and legislative branches are virtually ignored. No particular amendments receive special attention, though students are expected to “summarize the importance of both the right to due process of law and the individual rights established in the Bill of Rights in the American legal system” (CL.C&G.4.5).

Because of the way that the content is organized, there is some civics “content” in other high school courses. For example, the required Economics and Personal Finance course has several objectives about the government’s role in the economy (a few of which are substantive). Similarly, students of World History study international organizations, as well as “how policies and treaties have led to international conflict, now and in the past.” Finally, the American History course devotes two standards and seven objectives to civics. However, as elsewhere, there are no specifics, and in some cases there is no discernible meaning. For example, students of American History are expected to “distinguish decisions by executive, legislative, and judicial leaders in terms of resolving conflict and establishing compromise” (AH.C&G.1.4:).

Skills and Dispositions

Skills that are relevant to citizenship can be found in the inquiry indicators at the beginning of each grade-level outline or course (though one must often wade through a few generic indicators to find these kernels). For example, students in the early grades learn about facts, opinions, and primary and secondary sources, and high school students differentiate between cause, effect, and correlation and are supposed to participate in rigorous discussions emphasizing

multiple viewpoints. However, a well-constructed media-literacy indicator would be a welcome addition to both the middle and high school indicators.

Throughout the standards, but particularly in the behavioral sciences strand, North Carolina places a premium on understanding and respecting different cultures and the experiences of historically marginalized groups. Yet there is little attention to cultivating other civic dispositions, such as respect for opposing viewpoints or a commitment to the preservation of constitutional democracy. Finally, although the inquiry strand includes a category on “taking informed action,” it is thoroughly uninspiring. For example, middle school students are expected to “use a range of civic approaches to address problems being investigated” (I.1.11). What approaches? What sorts of problems?

Clarity and Organization: 1/3

The presentation of North Carolina’s social studies standards is reasonably straightforward. However, the five disciplinary strands impose a rigid structure that is particularly ill suited to the high school courses, where strands like geography and behavioral sciences don’t always fit within the content. In addition to this structural problem, there are also other strange choices and apparent errors. For example, the high school standard on the roles of the three branches of

Strengths & Weaknesses of the North Carolina Civics Standards

Strengths

1. The inquiry indicators have the seeds of some worthwhile skills.

Weaknesses

1. Overbroad, vague, and poorly worded standards plague the document.
2. Essential content is missing or mishandled.
3. Organization is poor.

government consists of four objectives that deal exclusively with federalism, and it's hard to say why the final civics and government standard lumps the judicial system in with the political system.

U.S. History: F

In Brief

North Carolina's U.S. History standards provide inadequate guidance for school districts and teachers, due to a near total absence of specific content.

Content and Rigor: 1/7

K-8

There is no clear guidance regarding what historical content is to be covered in any given elementary or middle school grade. In the early grades, emphasis is placed almost entirely on skills. Change over time, comparison, and causation are covered, as are "people," "events," and "primary and secondary sources"—but without reference to any specific history. For example, the second-grade course, *America: Our Nation*, has a single standard that calls for students to "understand how various people and events have shaped America," but the associated objectives don't include a single historical figure, event, or document. Similarly, the standards for grades 3 and 4 profess to cover local and state history but without any specifics. Finally, the objectives for grade 5, which focus on U.S. History, repeat the grade 4 objectives almost verbatim. According to the document, fifth-grade students will "transfer their understanding from the state to the national level."

After two years of World History (in grades 6 and 7), grade 8 returns to "North Carolina and United States History"—presumably to build on what students learned in grades 4 and 5. It also aspires to help students "understand and appreciate the legacy of our democratic republic" and to embark "on a more rigorous study of the historical foundations and democratic principles that continue to shape our state and nation." Though these are undoubtedly

worthy goals, the standards again fail to deliver. As in fourth and fifth grade, there is no outline of North Carolina or U.S. History—only more references to "conflict and cooperation" and "innovation and change."

High School

Like the K-8 history standards, the high school standards for American History are conceptual, failing to reference non-negotiable historical content. There is a reference to "domestic conflicts" but no mention of the Civil War. There is a reference to "international conflicts" but no mention of World War I or World War II. There is a reference to "foreign policy" but no mention of the Cold War or Vietnam. Students are expected to "differentiate the experience of war on groups and individuals in terms of contribution, sacrifice, and opposition" (AH.H.1.3). They are also to "critique the extent to which economic, social, cultural, geographic, and political factors of various turning points changed the American historical narrative" (AH.H.3.3). But studying the Civil War and the Civil Rights movement would probably be simpler.

In addition to these shortcomings, the high school American History course starts after the culmination of the French and Indian War (1763) and continues to the present day, meaning

Strengths & Weaknesses of the North Carolina U.S. History Standards

Strengths

1. Skills development is reasonably well handled in the inquiry sections.

Weaknesses

1. The lack of specific historical content results in insufficient guidance for teachers, students, and other stakeholders.
2. Not using historical periods and eras hinders chronological reasoning and makes it impossible to discern the full scope and sequence of courses.

that any knowledge or understanding of the colonial period must come from earlier grades—where, as noted, there are reasons to doubt that students will learn anything specific.

Skills Development

As noted in the Civics portion of this review, the inquiry strand does a reasonable job of outlining skills, many of which are relevant to the practice of history. As the grade level increases, these become progressively more sophisticated. For example, students in the early grades learn about facts, opinions, and primary and secondary sources. Those in grades 3–5 are expected to assess the origin, reliability, and credibility of those sources. Middle school students are expected to draw from multiple perspectives and identify the strengths and limitations of various sources. Finally, high school students are expected to “participate in rigorous academic discussions emphasizing multiple viewpoints in which claims and evidence are acknowledged, critiqued, and built upon in order to create new understandings of complex historical or current issues.”

Clarity and Organization: 1/3

In general, the history standards make no attempt at content outlining. Furthermore, as noted in the Civics portion of this review, the use of thematic disciplinary strands is often a barrier to effective organization—especially in high school.

Recommendations

Civics

1. **Bolster the high school content** (e.g., by adding discrete standards or objectives on the legislative and executive branches, as well as rule of law, judicial review, electoral process, and comparative government).
2. **Align the fifth-grade civics content with the focus on U.S. History** (e.g., by addressing the Declaration of Independence, the Articles of Confederation, the Constitutional Convention, and the Bill of Rights, among other essential documents).

3. **Articulate what students should know** instead of asking them to “exemplify,” “critique,” “distinguish,” “differentiate,” “compare,” “assess,” or “classify” massive bodies of unspecified content that cannot or should not be handled in those ways.
4. **Use fourth and eighth grade to explore the principle of equal protection** (e.g., by studying the impact of *Brown v. Board of Education*, the Civil Rights Act, and the Voting Rights Act in North Carolina).

U.S. History

1. **Organize the standards into commonly used historical periods.**
2. **Specify the essential historical content within those periods.**

Both Subjects

1. **Provide much more specific guidance.**
2. **Improve the organization, especially in high school** (e.g., by only including disciplinary strands that are relevant to the course in question).

Documents Reviewed

- “2021 Approved Social Studies Standards,” <https://sites.google.com/dpi.nc.gov/social-studies/standards/public-draft-reviews>

Revisions to the North Carolina Social Studies Standards are currently underway.

North Dakota

A	Exemplary	10
	Standards worthy of implementation	9
B	Good	8
	Targeted revisions recommended	7
C	Mediocre	6
	Significant revisions strongly recommended	5
D	Inadequate	4
F	Complete revision recommended before implementation	3
		2
		0-1

Civics: D+

Content & Rigor: 3/7

Clarity & Organization: 1/3

Total Score: 4/10

U.S. History: D+

Content & Rigor: 3/7

Clarity & Organization: 1/3

Total Score: 4/10

Overview

North Dakota's current civics and U.S. History standards are inadequate. Although they do reference some essential content, the presentation is cryptic, and there is no distinction between middle school and high school content. A complete revision is recommended before implementation.

Description of the Standards

North Dakota's social studies standards are divided into two grade bands: K-5 and 6-12. In the K-5 band, the standards are also divided into four strands: civics and government, economics, geography, and history—to which the 6-12 band adds world history, North Dakota studies, and other topics. In K-5, each strand is subdivided into topical "themes," each of which receives a chart laying out standards and "guiding questions" for the K-2 and 3-5 grade bands. In the 6-12 band, most strands have charts listing subject-specific standards, subsidiary "benchmarks," and "guiding topics" for each benchmark. Yet the history strand is instead divided into five eras, each with the same six conceptual standards, three to six era-specific benchmarks, and guiding topics that provide specific examples. Notably, the 6-12 band isn't subdivided into narrower grade bands, though Appendix A offers a "suggested outline" for each grade. This is followed by appendices on Tribal Government (Appendix B), "Civics Education Learning Design" (Appendix C), and "Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects" (Appendix D).

Civics: D+

In Brief

North Dakota's civics standards are inadequate, due to a general dearth of substantive content and an inexcusable failure to distinguish between content that should be taught in middle school and content that should be taught in North Dakota's twelfth grade U.S. Government course (or elsewhere in high school).

Content and Rigor: 3/7

K-5

The elementary standards for civics are subdivided into standards for grades K-2 and grades 3-5, with each band containing precisely seven standards: four under "Origin, Purpose, and Function of Civics" and three under "Roles and Involvement of United States Citizens and Residents." In addition, seven "guiding questions" are offered along with one "consideration" (to include tribal government, which is dismissively housed in Appendix B).

With few exceptions, the standards are extraordinarily broad and vague. For example, C.K_2.4 asks educators to "Describe the core values represented by symbols of the United States," but fails to name any symbols or values. Similarly, C.3_5.6 asks educators to "Compare and contrast personal and civic responsibilities and explain why they are important in community life," but doesn't elaborate. Finally, C3_5.2 demands that teachers cover *all* the ground and "Describe the structure of government and how it functions to serve citizens/residents (e.g., Constitution, Amendments [*sic*], government leaders)."

As these examples suggest, it's impossible to discern what information about U.S. government students in North Dakota are expected to learn at any elementary grade level, or what qualities the state seeks to cultivate beyond a general and universal consideration for others.

6-12

At the secondary level, North Dakota has precisely four civics standards: "Explain the historical and philosophical

foundations of government," "Analyze the structures and functions of governments," "Describe the rights and liberties of individuals," and "Investigate the role and responsibilities of citizenship in society." Each of these standards contains two to five "benchmarks" (also extremely vague, starting with C.6_12.1.1: "Evaluate the thoughts of major political philosophers"), which come with several "guiding topics." However, there is no evidence of any intended progression or sequence by grade level, topic, or anything else.

As suggested by the breadth of each standard and benchmark, the guiding topics contain a disorderly hodgepodge of suggested content. For example, under C.6_12.2.4's mandate to "Explain the relationship among federal, state, tribal, and local governmental powers" lie the Supreme Court cases *Marbury v. Madison*, *Gibbons v. Ogden*, *McCulloch v. Maryland*, and *Brown v. Board of Education*. If there is some common thread that runs through those cases, to say nothing of the many key cases clearly pertaining to this topic (*U.S. v. Lopez*, *Gonzalez v. Raich*, *Roe v. Wade*, etc.), it is a slender one. (*Marbury*, though obviously important, has nothing to do with intergovernmental relations or federalism, and saying *Brown* is about intergovernmental relations is like saying *Les Misérables* is about a loaf of bread.)

Or consider C.6_12.2.2, which vaguely asks teachers and students to "Examine the role and purposes of government" by studying the purposes of founding governments in "River Valley, Asian, Greek, Roman, African, Mesoamerican civilizations" but provides no further guidance. No practicing educator would find this advice helpful.

Compared to the examples, the benchmark on comparative government is reasonably clear and comprehensive, listing democracy, monarchy, oligarchy, tyranny, fascism, communism, theocracy, constitutional republic, parliamentary democracy, and presidential democracy as guiding topics. Yet this is a rare exception.

Notably, there is more emphasis on tribal issues at the secondary level, though the relevant benchmarks are, again, very broad.

Skills and Dispositions

Two appendices ensure that North Dakota gets at least partial credit when it comes to fostering the skills and dispositions that are essential to effective citizenship.

Specifically, Appendix C (“Civics Learning Design”) addresses some fundamental dispositions by encouraging students to “Identify a community problem, analyze its root causes, and devise a policy-oriented goal and plan for addressing the problem” and “Engage in discourse about public policy beyond the classroom through social media, letters to the editor, public presentations, or service learning projects.” However, this part of the standards would benefit from greater exposition. (“How can you help others?” is as close as North Dakota gets to a grade-appropriate exploration of specific civic dispositions.)

Somewhat more impressive is Appendix D, which adds a set of grade 6–12 reading and writing standards for literacy in history/social studies that expect students to evaluate the sources of information, judge the strength of the evidence supporting a conclusion, recognize point of view, distinguish cause and correlation, and compose a reasoned argument on a matter of social importance. Like the expectations in Appendix C, the expectations embodied in these standards are highly relevant to informed citizenship, so it’s unfortunate that they, too, are relegated to an appendix.

Clarity and Organization: 1/3

North Dakota’s social studies standards are reasonably user friendly. The document is divided into easy-to-find sections that are visually clear. And the accompanying charts are uncluttered and readable (though sorely lacking in actual substance).

The fundamental problem is that there is no discernible scope or sequence. No expectations are laid out for any individual grade level. Optional sequences are relegated to Appendix A and don’t tie into any specific content between sixth and eleventh grades. Finally, the change in format between the K–5 standards and the 6–12 standards is particularly unhelpful for civics, where the absence of any discernible relationship between the seven K–5 topics and the four 6–12 topics contributes to the overall sense of haphazardness.

In addition to these defects, the decision to relegate tribal government to an appendix at the K–5 level is unfortunate.

Strengths & Weaknesses of the North Dakota Civics Standards

Strengths

1. There is a clear division of subtopics within civics at the K-5 level.
2. The 6–12 standards include a clear and concise benchmark delineating key topics in comparative government.

Weaknesses

1. The standards don’t distinguish between content that should be explored in middle school and North Dakota’s required high school U.S. Government course.
2. There are no grade-specific standards or progressions across grade levels.
3. Little specific content is suggested in any area.
4. Disparate topics are often grouped together due to the breadth of most standards.
5. Compared to the other social studies subdisciplines, the treatment of issues of particular concern to Native Americans is lacking.
6. There is no discernible attempt to cultivate essential civic dispositions, such as a commitment to constitutional democracy or the capacity to engage in civic discourse.

U.S. History: D+

In Brief

North Dakota's U.S. History standards are inadequate, with little substantive content for the K–5 grade band, no distinction between middle school and high school content in the 6–12 grade band, and no grade-specific content at any grade level.

Content and Rigor: 3/7

K–5

Content guidance for U.S. History in North Dakota's K–5 band is almost nonexistent.

The K–5 history strand is divided into three thematic sub-units: “Perspectives,” “Cause, Effect, and Current Events,” and “Connections, Contributions, Historical Sources, and Evidence.” Specific content, such as it is, is signaled by the “guiding questions,” which apply to both the K–2 and 3–5 bands. Thus, the difference between the bands lies not in their content, but in the analytical goals laid out in the individual standards. For example, under “Cause, Effect, and Current Events,” the standard for K–2 asks students to “Describe current events,” while the standard for grades 3–5 asks students to “Describe multiple causes and effects of contemporary global events,” as well as “analyze” holidays and “how they impact culture.” (Spare a thought for the overburdened North Dakota teacher who must figure out how one analyzes the impact of a holiday on culture.)

In general, the content laid out by the “guiding questions” is limited and thematically jumbled. Early grades touch on conventional material, including lists of holidays and famous persons. “Examples” intended to illustrate the standards’ broad analytical thrusts include extremely general and scattershot references to historical events. For example, students are asked to consider “different perspectives” during the Revolutionary War, the Civil Rights era, and a government shutdown, as well as “causes and effects” such as “events during exploration and colonization, in addition to current events.”

No specific sequence is required, though an appendix lays

out suggested sequences, placing local history in third grade, state history in fourth grade, and exploration/colonization in fifth grade.

6–12

Unlike the K–5 standards, the U.S. History strand for grades 6–12 makes some effort to outline an actual course. For example, instead of purely thematic sub-units it is divided into five eras, the first two identified by subject and date, the last three by date only: “Creation and Foundation of United States Government (1754–1814);” “Growth and Division in the Union (1814–1877);” “1877–1941;” “1941–2001;” and “2001–present.” The suggested sequence in Appendix A places eras 1 and 2 in eighth grade, with either eras 3–5 or 3–4 assigned to eleventh grade. (High school U.S. History is “required,” but era 5, 2001–present, appears to be optional.) But assigning the same standards to all grades from sixth through twelfth, with no distinction even between early middle school and high school, is itself a serious problem.

Each era is assigned the same six conceptual standards, touching on primary and secondary sources, multiple perspectives, cause and effect, change over time, significant contributions, and historical lessons in current events. The “benchmarks” now form broad subject-specific standards (e.g., “Explain the social, political, and cultural causes and immediate consequences of the American Revolution.”). Finally, the “guiding topics” column does include a few specifics in the form of an uneven list of “key topics,” which the introduction designates as “fundamental” but not “required.” These provide some semblance of content guidance, touching on a number of important points in roughly chronological order (though without any explication).

Because exploration and colonization are only covered in K–5 (where the standards provide essentially no content guidance), the 6–12 U.S. History strand begins in 1754. However, although 6–12 Civics discusses British influences on colonial political thought, there is no direct reference—either there or in the history course—to the emergence of colonial self-government or the emergence and entrenchment of slavery (though the slave trade is mentioned in 6–12 World History).

The bare list of guiding topics begins with “French-Indian War,” but nothing is said about why that was important

or how it led to British actions that helped precipitate the Revolutionary crisis. Likewise, references to the Articles of Confederation, United States Constitution, Federalist Papers, Anti-Federalist viewpoint, and Bill of Rights mark much crucial ground, but with no explanation whatsoever. Jefferson, Hamilton, and the rise of parties are noted, but the crucial Washington presidency is not, and a reference to “pertinent Supreme Court cases and laws” is unhelpfully vague.

Although the standards for “Growth and Division in the Union” touch on the early nineteenth century reform movements, Westward Expansion, and sectional split, the only references to slavery in the standards occur in the context of the sectional schism and the secession crisis. Similarly, although the Reconstruction Amendments, Jim Crow laws, migration from the South, and the Compromise of 1877 are all duly invoked, a vague reference to “Reconstruction plans” leaves much to be desired.

In the three more modern eras, detail is even more erratic. For example, the struggle for civil rights is addressed in just three words (“Civil Rights Movement”) and thus lacks even the obligatory reference to Martin Luther King, Jr. Yet stagflation, the Pentagon Papers, and the Clinton impeachment all draw specific mentions. Finally, coverage of 2001–present largely focuses on post-9/11 responses to terrorism and the debate over immigrant status.

Skills Development

Beyond asking students to “compare perspectives” and “demonstrate chronological thinking,” there is little emphasis on skills in the content standards until grades 6–12, where the six broad standards invoke the analysis of primary and secondary sources, “multiple perspectives,” and comparison of “historical elements” over time—broad and basic points, offered with little explication. However, Appendix D does present “Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects” that focus on the development of increasingly sophisticated reading and interpretative skills in grades 6–8, 9–10, and 11–12.

As noted in the Civics portion of this review, the aims are straightforward: Read closely to determine a text’s meaning, cite specific evidence in analysis, consider the date and origin of the text, assess the author’s use of evidence, and challenge an author’s premises (at more advanced levels).

Primary and secondary sources are noted, but not explicitly differentiated. Still, the expectations embodied in these literacy standards are reasonable, so it is unfortunate that they are relegated to an appendix.

Strengths & Weaknesses of the North Dakota U.S. History Standards

Strengths

1. The 6–12 grade band U.S. History course has a reasonably substantive checklist of important events and issues in the “guiding topics” column, despite the lack of explication or context.
2. The standards document is clearly presented and easy to use, despite its substantive failings.

Weaknesses

1. There is no distinction between middle school and high school content in the 6–12 grade band.
2. The standards generally fail to associate specific content with individual grades.
3. The standards for the K–5 grade band include almost no substantive specifics.
4. The 6–12 “guiding topics” list for U.S. History is uneven and too often cryptic.
5. Colonial history is not revisited in the more substantively outlined 6–12 course, leaving the period without specific detail at any level.
6. The optional U.S. History sequences suggested in an appendix split U.S. History between fifth, eighth, and eleventh grades, with the colonial period covered only in fifth grade and later eras covered only once, in the 6–12 band.

Clarity and Organization: 1/3

As noted in the civics portion of this review, North Dakota's social studies standards document is fairly straightforward in its presentation. But the social studies sequence is barely defined and its scope is vague, especially in the K-5 band.

The single, overly broad 6-12 band is also a serious problem: Sixth grade is an environment very different from high school, and the two should not be lumped together. The suggested sequence in Appendix A conventionally divides U.S. History between grades 8 and 11, but actual assignment of specific content to individual grades K-8 and high school would be greatly preferable.

Documents Reviewed

- "North Dakota Social Studies Content Standards, Grades K-12," 2019, https://www.nd.gov/dpi/sites/www/files/documents/Academic%20Support/Rev5_2021.05.19_Social_Studies_Content%20Standards.pdf

Recommendations

Civics

1. Delineate essential content at a far more granular level in all grade bands.
2. Articulate some sort of grade-to-grade progression within grade bands.
3. Integrate topics of particular concern to Native Americans into the civics standards.

U.S. History

1. Restructure the standards to ensure that students cover U.S. History in full at least twice.
2. Provide specific and substantive content outlining at the K-5 level.
3. Expand the outlines for all grade levels to indicate why the content is important and how individuals and events interrelate.

Both Subjects

1. Provide standards for individual grades (K-8) and high school courses, rather than for grade bands.

Civics and U.S. History

Ohio

A	Exemplary	10
	Standards worthy of implementation	9
B	Good	8
	Targeted revisions recommended	7
C	Mediocre	6
	Significant revisions strongly recommended	5
D	Inadequate	4
	Complete revision recommended before implementation	3
F		2
		0-1

Civics: B

Content & Rigor: 5/7

Clarity & Organization: 2/3

Total Score: 7/10

U.S. History: C

Content & Rigor: 4/7

Clarity & Organization: 2/3

Total Score: 6/10

Overview

Ohio's civics standards are good, but its U.S. History standards are mediocre. There is almost no U.S. History content before eighth grade, when a single, two-year survey begins. In civics, targeted revisions are recommended, and in U.S. History, significant revisions are strongly recommended.

Description of the Standards

Ohio's Learning Standards for Social Studies provide individual outlines for grades K-8 and for six high school courses, including required courses in U.S. History and U.S. Government.

Each K-8 grade is defined by an overarching theme and divided into four strands—history, geography, government, and economics—that are subdivided into topics, which are in turn supplied with “content statements.” High school courses are not divided into strands but into thematic/chronological topics, which are provided in turn with content statements.

A “model curriculum” document expands substantially on the Learning Standards by furnishing each content statement with one or more “content elaboration” items that offer additional explanatory guidance for teachers and districts and an “expectations for learning” statement that summarizes target knowledge. However, grade-level themes are only identified in the Learning Standards.

Civics: B

In Brief

Ohio consistently emphasizes civic dispositions and skill building. Its high school American Government class, as detailed in the “model curriculum,” is strong, especially when paired with the civics content in the U.S. History course.

Content and Rigor: 5/7

K-8

Ohio devotes a significant portion of its K–5 standards to civic dispositions and skill building, as opposed to substantive mechanics. For example, the earliest grades focus on the concepts of responsibility, authority, rules, and fairness. Although these ideas are broadly sketched in the Learning Standards, the model curriculum fills in details in a thoughtful and age-appropriate manner.

Second grade introduces the distinction between rules and laws, plus the idea that there are different rules and laws in different settings (e.g., in the classroom, on the playground or athletic field, or at home). Third grade introduces the concept of government—the entity that enforces and sometimes changes the law—and, in particular, the various types of local governments (e.g., county, municipal, and township). Even in the model curriculum, these concepts hover at a pretty high altitude, although there are concrete examples of rights and responsibilities such as voting, paying taxes, and obeying the law.

Fourth grade provides an introduction to Ohio history, including the Northwest Ordinance (and, by extension, slavery and trial by jury). Among other things, students learn that citizens have rights and responsibilities in both the United States and Ohio, that the U.S. Constitution establishes a system of limited government, and that both the U.S. and Ohio constitutions divide the responsibility of governing between three branches. Even in the model curriculum, more could be done to compare and contrast state and national governments. However, the standards and content elaborations on First Amendment freedoms and the

three branches are admirably clear and approachable, and by the end of grade 4, students in Ohio have studied civic dispositions and civics skills in significant depth.

Grades 5 through 7 are devoted to world history and are thus the logical place to introduce students to the basics of comparative government. Fifth grade gets the ball rolling by asking students to compare and contrast democracies, monarchies, and dictatorships. Sixth grade adds theocracies to the mix and correctly notes that “actual systems of government are not always easily categorized and can be misrepresented.” Finally, the civics strand for seventh grade touches on the contributions of the Greeks, Romans, and Magna Carta and explicitly ties them to the United States government.

Grade 8 begins the two-year U.S. History cycle and thus includes a great deal of civics content within the history strand, including the ideals of the Enlightenment, the Declaration of Independence, the problems with the Articles of Confederation, the disputes of the Constitutional Convention, the debates between Federalists and anti-Federalists, the Alien and Sedition Acts, *Marbury v. Madison*, *McCulloch v. Maryland*, disputes over the nature of federalism leading up to the Civil War (but not *Dred Scott*), and the Reconstruction Amendments.

In addition to these expectations, the government strand for eighth grade covers the separation of powers and checks and balances with reasonably good detail, and the content statement for the Bill of Rights adds some elements of due process and freedom from cruel and unusual punishment to the quiver of individual rights. Other topics that Ohio would ideally have included by the end of eighth grade include how a bill becomes a law and the role of political parties in the American system.

High School

Ohio’s high school American History course contains substantial civics material and handles it well, in part because the course begins with a cogent look back at the founding documents—the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights—before continuing on with the rest of U.S. History, which is also well handled. Content statement 12, which covers Reconstruction, would be stronger if it directly referenced the Reconstruction

Amendments. However, it does call out *Plessy v. Ferguson*. Content statement 13, which covers the Progressive era, mentions numerous acts of Congress and the Sixteenth, Seventeenth, Eighteenth, and Nineteenth Amendments. Similarly, the Civil Rights era is handled well in content statement 27, with references to specific legislation and *Brown v. Board of Education*. Finally, the content elaboration for content statement 32 offers wonderful opportunities to apply civics knowledge by debating domestic policy topics like national security and civil liberties, gun control, and LGBTQ+ rights, while content statement 33 provides similar opportunities for foreign policy issues such as international humanitarianism and the role of the United Nations.

As laid out in the model curriculum, Ohio’s American Government course provides reasonable coverage of many essential civics topics. However, although the course goes a level deeper than previous courses in many areas, some puzzling gaps prevent it from achieving true excellence.

To wit, a discussion of federalism *again* focuses on the debates between Federalists and anti-Federalists, rather than how tensions between state and federal governments play out in the contemporary world (though it does reference the Supremacy and Necessary and Proper clauses). Similarly, a section on the Bill of Rights adds references to *habeas corpus*, protection against double jeopardy, and other elements of due process, as well as probable cause and the Second Amendment. However, it doesn’t reference any of the twentieth-century Supreme Court cases that might make some of those topics come alive.

Standards for other topics are similarly incomplete. For example, the structure of the U.S. government is laid out in greater depth than in previous courses, with content statements listing powers of the three branches and outlining checks and balances. Yet the list of congressional powers is thin, inexplicably omitting the power to regulate commerce (among others), and there is no real coverage of the federal bureaucracy (the growth of which is among the most consequential developments in the field). Similarly, the Reconstruction Amendments, Voting Rights Amendments, and amendments impacting the Electoral College procedures and the executive branch all receive their own content statements. However, in an ideal world, coverage of the Fourteenth Amendment’s impact would be broader, instead of focusing almost exclusively on how it helped African

Americans. And there is almost nothing on the nuts and bolts of nonpresidential elections or other aspects of electoral process (e.g., redistricting, campaign finance, and voter access).

To its credit, Ohio makes sure that students understand their state constitution and how entities such as the Department of State, Congressional Budget Office, and the Ohio Legislative Service Commission help the U.S. and Ohio governments develop policy. However, a section on public policy might be more engaging for students if it focused on the challenges and trade-offs that policymakers face when crafting solutions to pressing problems—e.g., juvenile justice or immigration—rather than examples of the different branches of government in action.

Finally, there is nothing in the American Government standards on how the U.S. interacts with other countries (though the high school World History course does have content statements about international treaties and

Strengths & Weaknesses of the Ohio Civics Standards

Strengths

1. The high school American Government course covers many topics with detail and subtlety.
2. The high school U.S. History class also includes a good deal of worthy civics content.
3. Ohio’s civics standards place a strong emphasis on civic dispositions and critical thinking.

Weaknesses

1. The course on American Government provides little or no coverage of the nuts and bolts of elections, the growth of the executive branch, or comparative government.
2. The way the Curriculum Framework is formatted leaves something to be desired.

multinational organizations), nor is there anything that might be described as comparative government (e.g., comparing and contrasting presidential and parliamentary systems or alternatives to “first-past-the-post” elections), without which even students who have a solid grasp of the American system may lack perspective.

Skills and Dispositions

Ohio takes skills development seriously. For example, students in fourth grade learn to “identify possible cause and effect relationships; distinguish between fact and opinion; read and interpret various types of data; recognize perspective and purpose; and compare points of agreement and disagreement.” Similarly, high school students are asked to consider “the qualifications/reputation of the writer and/or organization; the circumstances in which the source material was generated; internal consistency and agreement with other credible sources; use of supporting evidence and logical conclusions; and evidence of bias or unstated assumptions” (American Government, CS 2). As a final step, the state should consider asking students to examine their own thinking for evidence of bias—for example, by using their understanding of “confirmation bias” to critique their understanding of the facts.

The cultivation of civic dispositions is also a strength of the Ohio standards, which consistently emphasize accountability, compromise, and the opportunities that are available to impact one’s community. The following third-grade content elaboration is indicative of Ohio’s tone:

Individuals participate effectively in the community when they exhibit citizenship traits such as: civility; respect for the rights and dignity of each person; volunteerism; compromise; compassion; persistence in achieving goals; and civic-mindedness (Grade 3, CS 10).

Notably, students in high school are expected to “analyze a public policy issue in terms of collaboration or conflict among the levels of government involved and the branches of government involved”—a worthy assignment that might be even more meaningful if students were explicitly asked to research a problem in their community, evaluate the proposed solutions, and make the case for a specific course of action.

Clarity and Organization: 2/3

Ohio’s Learning Standards document would profit from better visual presentation, as it can be difficult to identify different strands and topics and presentation changes between K–8 and high school. Still, the document is useable, and the model curriculum document—which contains substantial additional material and is most likely to be relied upon by teachers—is more straightforwardly presented, with strands, topics, and content statements organized sequentially. Because the model curriculum material is approved by the Ohio’s board of education, it would be simpler to present a single document with the Learning Standards’ introductory materials and the model curriculum’s expanded content.

U.S. History: C

In Brief

Ohio’s social studies standards provide patchy and chronologically muddled coverage of most U.S. History essentials. Moreover, there is almost no U.S. History as such in grades K–7.

Content and Rigor: 4/7

K–8

Grades K–3 work outwards from self to family to community, focusing primarily on conventional and age-appropriate topics such as change over time, concepts of chronology, diverse heritages and traditions, patriotic symbols, types of historic sources, and so forth. However, no specific historical content appears until grade 4, which focuses on Ohio history from precontact to the antebellum period, including the Northwest Ordinance and the Underground Railroad. Although the outline for grade 4 consists of just six very broad content statements, the aptly named content elaboration items in the model curriculum provide significant additional specifics—enough to provide an adequate fourth-grade framework.

Grade 5 focuses on “regions and people of the Western Hemisphere,” but its history strand offers only two substantive content statements, glancing briefly at early Native American civilizations and European exploration/colonization to 1600. Here, the model curriculum offers only limited detail, while other strands discuss cultural regions and diverse groups in the Americas but add no historical content.

After grades 6 and 7 cover the Eastern Hemisphere and early world history, grade 8 turns at last to U.S. History, from 1492 to 1877. The history strand for grade 8 includes thirteen extremely broad content statements, which are divided between four chronological topics. Again, specific content appears in the model curriculum, but the small number of content statements leaves limited space for detail.

The content elaboration items for grade 8 refer to grade 5 for coverage of early Native American cultures, quickly but adequately discuss the motives for European exploration, and very broadly note European imperial rivalries. A section on slavery in the colonies is reasonably solid, but nothing else is said about colonial regions or development, including the rise of self-government. The outline simply skips ahead to the American Revolution, with little context or connection (popular government is attributed to imported Enlightenment ideas, seriously underplaying older British traditions and the internal evolution of the colonies). A brief list of Revolutionary events and generic statements about their impact gives way to stronger consideration of the Articles of Confederation and their weaknesses. However, the issues of the Constitutional Convention are given comparatively short shrift. A compact but adequate list of issues is provided for the first five presidencies, including the importance of Washington’s precedent-setting terms and the election of 1800 but *not* the rise of parties.

Territorial expansion receives a fair amount of space, but domestic developments such as industrialization and reform movements go unmentioned. The sectional crisis is discussed, but the centrality of slavery is worryingly sidelined, with an excessive emphasis on economic and states’ rights issues. The Civil War receives little more than a short list of events. Finally, coverage of Reconstruction is rushed, with little sense that developments occurred over a period of several decades.

Some historical issues are split off into the other three strands, undermining coherent presentation. For example, regional economic trends, immigration, and the rise of national identity are broadly noted under geography. Abolitionism and the women’s suffrage movement are mentioned under government. Finally, early industrialization and internal improvements appear under economics.

High School

The high school U.S. History course completes the single survey of U.S. History, covering the time period from 1877 to the present. The outline is significantly longer than the grade 8 outline, with a total of twenty-nine more specific substantive content statements spread across eight chronological topics. Strands are no longer used, so related material isn’t broken up.

The course opens with a look back at key founding documents—somewhat randomly discussing some points (such as Federalists and anti-Federalists) omitted from grade 8—before turning to post-Civil War Industrialism and

Strengths & Weaknesses of the Ohio U.S. History Standards

Strengths

1. Ohio’s high school U.S. History course provides reasonably thorough coverage of the second half of U.S. History.
2. There is a strong emphasis on history-related skills across all grade levels.

Weaknesses

1. Because Ohio offers only one U.S. History course across grade 8 and high school, students in lower grades may lack even a basic understanding of U.S. History.
2. The grade 8 portion of the U.S. History course is far weaker than the high school course.

the Progressive response, up to 1920. In general, the model curriculum’s coverage of industrialization, urbanization, the labor movement, westward expansion and its impact on Native Americans, the rise of Jim Crow, and Progressive reforms is solid. However, the discussion of immigration needs more specifics on actual immigrant groups, and thematic organization makes a jumble of chronology. For example, the next topic briefly and patchily covers foreign affairs from 1898 to 1930, while a topic running from 1919 to 1941 looks at cultural and political trends of the 1920s (including the resurgence of the Klan and the 1919 Red Scare), the economic collapse, and the New Deal. Isolationism and WWII are covered in just two content statements, and the model curriculum’s discussion of the war mainly focuses on the home front, barely considering international dimensions.

Six content statements consider the Cold War from 1945 to its end in 1991, moving from the atomic bomb to containment, McCarthyism, Korea and Vietnam, and a rather rushed item on the collapse of the Soviet empire. As in earlier sections, detail and explanation are uneven (for example, the abuse of individual liberties by McCarthyism is far from clear) and chronology isn’t always defined. To wit, the next topic, which covers American “social transformations” from 1945 to 1994, includes one chronologically jumbled statement that covers the African American Civil Rights movement in reasonable detail before jamming in women’s rights, American Indian and Mexican American movements, gay rights, and so forth with far less substance. The next statement then jumps back again to the postwar economic and technological boom, while the next devotes an unusual amount of space to internal and foreign immigration and urbanization in and after the 1960s. Finally, a broad statement on political debates jumps from the Great Society to Reaganomics (stripping the New Right of its historical context) and the Vietnam antiwar movement.

A final topic devotes three content statements to the period from 1991 to the present, packing in modern technology, economic globalization and its fallout, terrorism, divisive recent political and economic issues, and foreign challenges (which repeats content on terrorism and globalization).

In short, the high school U.S. History course is more detailed and focused than the grade 8 outline. But coverage remains uneven, and repeated jumbling of chronology, especially after WWII, undermines clarity and context.

Skills Development

Each history strand and course opens with a “historical thinking and skills” topic, which is further elaborated in the model curriculum document. Early grades focus on basic concepts of chronology and introduce types of sources—including primary sources, which are defined by the model curriculum in grade 1. By grade 2, students are asked to use primary sources to investigate change over time. Grade 3 introduces secondary sources, use of which is expanded in grade 4. Grades 5 and 6 focus on timelines and the BC/BCE and AD/CE calendar. Grade 7 introduces discussion of multiple sources and perspectives, avoidance of presentism, and understanding of historical context (points that arguably should appear earlier) and promotes student research. Finally, grade 8 focuses broadly on primary and secondary sources, including analysis of their different perspectives and uses.

The high school U.S. History course devotes three content statements to history skills, including assessment of sources’ credibility, perspective, context, and biases; developing a thesis and backing it with evidence; and studying the causal relationship between events. Unfortunately, presentation of research is never emphasized, and nothing is said about written research products.

Clarity and Organization: 2/3

As discussed in the Civics review above, Ohio’s Learning Standards are usable, if a bit visually confused, while the model curriculum document is more straightforwardly presented—though it would be simpler if the model curriculum’s state-approved additional content were integrated into the Learning Standards.

The U.S. History sequence is perfectly clear in grade 8 and high school, both from course titles and from the content outlining itself. However, there is essentially no U.S. History sequence or scope prior to grade 8. Specific historical content is absent through grade 3. Grade 4 covers Ohio history only through the antebellum period. Finally, grade 5 glances only at Native American civilizations and European exploration, rather than tackling the Colonial period and/or the Revolution and the Founding era like most states that offer a single, overarching U.S. History course across all grade bands.

Recommendations

Civics

1. **Bolster the course on American Government** (e.g., by adding statements or elaborations on federalism, the electoral process, executive agencies, foreign policy, and comparative government).
2. **Include more Supreme Court cases** (e.g., in the sections dealing with the Bill of Rights, as well as the two U.S. History courses).

U.S. History

1. **Offer an introductory overview of U.S. History before grade 8.**
2. **Provide much deeper coverage of the first half of U.S. History in the grade 8 course.**
3. **Address the specific substantive gaps in the high school U.S. History course and ensure that content is organized chronologically.**
4. **Introduce history-related skills sooner and encourage written presentation.**

Both Subjects

1. **Integrate the model curriculum's additional content into the main Learning Standards document (and improve the formatting).**

Documents Reviewed

- "Ohio's Learning Standards: Social Studies," 2018, <http://education.ohio.gov/getattachment/Topics/Learning-in-Ohio/Social-Studies/Ohio-s-Learning-Standards-for-Social-Studies/SSFfinalStandards01019.pdf.aspx?lang=en-US>
- "Ohio's Model Curriculum: Social Studies," 2019, <http://education.ohio.gov/getattachment/Topics/Learning-in-Ohio/Social-Studies/Model-Curriculum-for-Social-Studies/OhiosModelCurriculumSocialStudies.pdf.aspx?lang=en-US>

Civics and U.S. History

Oklahoma

A	Exemplary	10
	Standards worthy of implementation	9
B	Good	8
	Targeted revisions recommended	7
C	Mediocre	6
	Significant revisions strongly recommended	5
D	Inadequate	4
	Complete revision recommended before implementation	3
F		2
		0-1

Civics: B+

Content & Rigor: 5/7

Clarity & Organization: 3/3

Total Score: 8/10

U.S. History: B+

Content & Rigor: 5/7

Clarity & Organization: 3/3

Total Score: 8/10

Overview

Oklahoma’s civics and U.S. History standards are quite good. In addition to deep content and clear organization, they exhibit an admirable commitment to telling the story of Native Americans. However, there are a few key omissions and misplaced items—and the decision to offer only one full U.S. History sequence creates some problems. Targeted revisions are recommended.

Description of the Standards

Oklahoma’s social studies standards are organized by grade at the pre-K-8 level and by course in high school, and each grade or course is itself divided into numbered standards that are divided into more specific “objectives.” Although the introductory material invokes the four standard social studies strands—history, geography, civics, and economics—the actual K-8 standards seem to expect schools and teachers to address the four strands in an integrated fashion.

In addition to the knowledge standards, the introduction to the Oklahoma Social Studies standards identifies five categories of skill-focused “practices,” including engagement with democratic processes, addressing civic issues, gathering and evaluating evidence, critically reading and interpreting sources, and evidence-based writing. Within each of these categories, two to three sub-items lay out

more specific goals, and an extensive appendix describes the “vertical progression” of multiple “classroom skills” or tasks for each sub-item across grade bands (pre-K–1, 2–3, 4–5, 6–8, and 9–12).

Civics: B+

In Brief

Oklahoma leaves many states in the dust with its commendably broad and deep framework for civics instruction. However, a few key omissions and a deficit of civics content in middle school keep it from achieving a perfect score.

Content and Rigor: 5/7

Pre–K–8

Oklahoma takes the unusual but commendable step of beginning with pre-K and progressing from basic knowledge and dispositions to slightly less basic knowledge and dispositions in an age-appropriate fashion. For example, four-year-old Sooners are expected to “Explain the need to respect the uniqueness of individuals in our class and community” (PK.1.2), while second graders are expected to “Identify the basic roles of national leaders including the President of the United States, the members of the United States Congress, and the justices of the Supreme Court” (2.1.4).

In third grade the focus is on Oklahoma, with a strong and specific emphasis on Native American topics (including tribal sovereignty) that continues through the later grades. However, fourth grade is somewhat disorganized and unfocused. For example, one objective demands a focus on democracy, equality, the rule of law, the common good, individual rights, civic responsibility, and diversity among individuals and groups (among other asks), while another objective focuses *solely* on environmental stewardship (thus implicitly assigning it extraordinary weight relative to the aforementioned topics).

Fifth grade social studies features a yearlong focus on the American Revolution, and in general the civics ground is well

covered. Key content like the framing of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution is addressed accurately and in detail. For example, objective 5.4.2 asks students to “Identify key leaders and explain the debates and compromises of the Constitutional Convention, including: A. Virginia and New Jersey Plans; B. Great Compromise; C. Three-fifths Compromise and its maintenance of the institution of slavery; D. Father of the Constitution, James Madison; E. President of the Convention, George Washington.”

Similarly, eighth grade takes a second pass at the American Revolution that adds thoughtful depth to the content addressed in fifth grade.

In contrast, sixth and seventh grades, which focus on the Western and Eastern hemispheres, contain almost no civics content other than a passing reference to comparative government. This is a wasted opportunity to address that important topic with the kind of precision and depth seen earlier. Unfortunately, the standards’ geographic focus means that no specific civilizations or forms of government are suggested, though Greece, Rome, and the Iroquois Confederacy would make for excellent civics content.

High School

The six standards for Oklahoma’s high school U.S. Government course, all but one of which include significant sub-standards, cover a diverse array of topics—from the three branches of government to the Federalist Papers, tribal sovereignty, federalism, and the electoral process.

In general, these standards are admirably thorough and specific. For example, USG 5.1 requires students to “Define civic virtue and explain the individual’s duty and responsibility to participate in civic life by voting, serving on juries, volunteering within the community, running for office, serving on a political campaign, paying state and federal taxes prior to the April 15th annual deadline, and respecting legitimate authority.”

Still, a few deficiencies are notable. In particular:

- There is no mention of redistricting, gerrymandering, primary elections, or voter access policies.
- Popular sovereignty is defined to include “protecting minority rights,” a definition better suited to liberal democracy.

- The standards provide little coverage of state and local government at the high school level.

Skills and Dispositions

In general, the focus on civics skills in Oklahoma’s first two “practices” categories—“democratic processes” and “civic issues”—is excellent. For example, high school students are expected to “analyze the role of informed and responsible citizens in their political systems and provide examples of changes in civic participation over time” (1.B.9–12.2).

Similarly, several standards provide reasonable coverage of essential civic dispositions, such as an inclination toward informed participation and service. For example, high school students are expected to “Define civic virtue and explain the individual’s duty and responsibility to participate in civic life by voting, serving on juries, volunteering within

the community, running for office, serving on a political campaign, paying state and federal taxes...and respecting legitimate authority” (USG.5.1).

Strengths & Weaknesses of the Oklahoma Civics Standards

Strengths

1. Oklahoma’s civics standards are impressively detailed and sophisticated, especially in grades five and eight.
2. In general, the grade level progressions are clear and developmentally appropriate.
3. It takes unusually commendable care with issues of particular importance to the Native American community.
4. In general, the standards are well-written and clearly organized.

Weaknesses

1. The civics content for grades four, six, and seven is weak or nonexistent.
2. Occasional omissions and misplaced items mar an otherwise admirable document.

Clarity and Organization: 3/3

Oklahoma’s standards document is straightforward, well organized, and easy to use. Standards are laid out in visually simple charts, rather than the complex charts, sub-charts, and sub-sub-charts that plague some standards documents. And the decision to address skills progressions in Appendix A is defensible, though it increases the risk that this more detailed account will be overlooked.

In general, the civics content is easily located, and the progressions from grade to grade are clear at the K–8 level.

U.S. History: B+

In Brief

Oklahoma’s U.S. History standards are frequently impressive, despite a few gaps and inaccuracies. However, the decision to offer a single U.S. History sequence across grades five, eight, and high school results in problematic coverage of some key content.

Content and Rigor: 5/7

Pre-K–8

Oklahoma’s early-grade standards (which begin, unusually, in pre-K) do not address U.S. History per se. However, they do introduce standard concepts of chronology and patriotic symbols, as well as more sophisticated material. Second and fourth grades are devoted to U.S. government and geography, including the influence of regional geographies on Indian populations and European settlement patterns, while third grade focuses on Oklahoma (and its Native American heritage in particular).

The standards become more detailed in fifth grade, which presents the first part of the state’s three-segment U.S. History survey—i.e., the period from colonization to the

Constitution. In general, the content is sophisticated, but not unreasonable for the age level. For example, the rise of slavery and the emergence of self-government are both properly emphasized, as is the experience of American Indians. And the lists of events/issues relating to the American Revolution and the Constitutional Convention are reasonably comprehensive, though the importance of specific events is never explained. However, it's troubling that the period prior to 1754 is covered only in fifth grade, when most students are too young to fully appreciate some material.

After a two-year survey of the geography and cultures of the Western and Eastern hemispheres in sixth and seventh grades, the U.S. History sequence resumes in eighth grade, which covers the period from the Revolution to Reconstruction (so the crucial era between 1754 and 1789 is covered a second time). Although the eighth-grade outline is often impressively detailed, there are odd gaps. For example, the Adams presidency and election of 1800 feature prominently, but the Washington presidency is reduced to his Indian policy and farewell address. Still, the sectional schism is well covered and slavery is correctly emphasized as its "principal cause," as are the secessionists, "who declared slavery as the central factor for seceding." More could be said about "the major plans" for Reconstruction, but the Black Codes, Reconstruction amendments, the Klan, sharecropping, and more are all duly invoked, as is the undermining of the gains associated with Reconstruction by 1876.

Finally, throughout the standards, Indian issues are given heavy weight—a net positive, considering the role of Native Americans in Oklahoma's own history, though at times this is arguably out of balance with other content.

High School

Oklahoma's high school U.S. History course runs from post-Reconstruction to the present, thus completing the single sequence begun in fifth and eighth grades.

Here, the standards' thematic organization somewhat undermines the chronology. For example, one of the first items covers immigration from the 1870s to the 1924 restrictions. Later, Nixon's détente with China appears before the Civil Rights Movement, which is followed (in no particular order) by the social and political transformations

of the early to mid-twentieth century, including the Supreme Court's application of the Fourteenth Amendment to the states, the Great Society, Indian rights movements, Cesar Chavez, the Women's Rights Movement, and Watergate, before jumping to President Carter and his successors.

Despite these organizational challenges, the level of detail is again impressive: Populism and Progressivism both get direct coverage, including Bryan's "Cross of Gold" speech and the Progressive Era amendments. *Plessy v. Ferguson* is specifically noted, as are Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois. Discussion of the 1920s includes not only the Harlem Renaissance, but also the resurgence of the Klan and lynchings, the Tulsa race riot, Black nationalism, and poll taxes/literacy tests. Coverage of FDR's presidency is somewhat rushed, but pre-war U.S. isolationism and appeasement are correctly stressed. And coverage of the World War II home front is strong, including references to German and Italian enemy aliens, the Japanese internment, and the Korematsu case.

Strengths & Weaknesses of the Oklahoma U.S. History Standards

Strengths

1. Oklahoma's U.S. History content is impressively detailed and sophisticated.
2. The standards successfully define essential analytical skills without allowing them to replace historical substance.
3. In general, the standards are admirably clear and well-written.

Weaknesses

1. The single U.S. History sequence across grades five, eight, and high school relegates the period before 1754 to fifth grade.
2. The thematic organization of the content items sometimes confuses the chronology.

Though densely packed, the standards that deal with the Cold War contain many key issues and events. (For example, Vietnam is linked to the “Domino Theory,” the impact of television coverage, and the counterculture.) Although the New Right is arguably given short shrift, global terrorism and 9/11 get more direct attention, as do individual items from the presidencies of George W. Bush, Barack Obama, and Donald Trump, including controversies over healthcare, climate change, race, immigration, and “perceived biases in the media”—contentious topics that are discussed in a commendably neutral tone.

Also included at the high school level is an Oklahoma History course, which covers everything from pre-contact Native American cultures to the present but mainly focuses on the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Although the period before statehood (1907) heavily emphasizes American Indian groups, including forced removals and the imposition of the reservation system, the transition from the Indian Territories to Oklahoma statehood is not especially clear. Nor is it clear whether the course itself is required.

Skills Development

As noted in the Civics review, Oklahoma lays out social studies “practices” that include both civic behaviors and critical skills, including some that are directly relevant to history, such as the critical evaluation of sources and historical evidence and the synthesis and integration of that evidence into written presentations.

In general, the specified skills, from citing evidence to constructing narratives and summarizing without plagiarizing, seem well suited to the task of research and analysis in history classes, as do the grade level progressions. For example, students are expected to identify primary sources by first grade, differentiate primary and secondary sources by third grade, and gather and analyze the credibility, origins, purpose, and potential biases of sources by middle and high school.

Clarity and Organization: 3/3

As discussed under Civics, Oklahoma’s social studies standards document is straightforward, clearly organized, and easy to use. The state’s decision not to split K–8 content into the usual social studies strands benefits the

presentation of history insofar as it allows related content to appear in integrated fashion, instead of being arbitrarily split among categories. Still, grouping specifics under thematic standards sometimes results in chronological disorganization of history content. And it would be helpful if the introductory material clarified which of the high school courses are required and which are electives.

In general, the scope and sequence of U.S. History are clear. However, the success of that sequence is inevitably limited by the decision to cover the Colonial era only at the primary level.

Recommendations

Civics

- 1. Bolster the high school course on U.S. Government** (e.g., by adding standards on redistricting, voter access policies, and state and local government).
- 2. Incorporate more civics content into the sixth and seventh grade world history standards.**
- 3. Consider adding an expectation that students learn to think critically about their own opinions** (e.g., by using their understanding of confirmation bias to critique their understanding of the facts).

U.S. History

- 1. Offer a more complete overview of U.S. History before high school** (followed by a second overview at the high school level).
- 2. Consider replacing some lists of events with more explanatory items** (along the lines of what already exists for other content items).

Both Subjects

- 1. Specify in the introductory material which high school courses are required.**
- 2. Preserve the considerable merits of the current standards in any future revisions.**

Documents Reviewed

- “Oklahoma Academic Standards for Social Studies,” 2019, <https://sde.ok.gov/sites/default/files/documents/files/Oklahoma%20Academic%20Standards%20for%20Social%20Studies%208.26.19.pdf>

Civics and U.S. History

Oregon

A	Exemplary	10
	Standards worthy of implementation	9
B	Good	8
	Targeted revisions recommended	7
C	Mediocre	6
	Significant revisions strongly recommended	5
D	Inadequate	4
F	Complete revision recommended before implementation	3
		2
		0-1

Civics: D-

Content & Rigor: 1/7

Clarity & Organization: 2/3

Total Score: 3/10

U.S. History: F

Content & Rigor: 1/7

Clarity & Organization: 1/3

Total Score: 2/10

Overview

Oregon's newly adopted civics and U.S. History standards are inadequate. Instead of specific and rigorous content, they offer vague exhortations and copious virtue signaling. A complete revision is recommended before implementation.

Description of the Standards

Oregon's recently updated social science standards, which were revised to incorporate the state's "ethnic studies" standards, offer outlines for individual grades K-8 and for high school. Most grades are divided into seven strands: civics and government, economics, financial literacy, geography, historical knowledge, historical thinking, and social science analysis (though the high school standards distinguish between microeconomics and the national and global economies). The historical knowledge strand is assigned a "focus" for each grade level, but most other strands are not. Each strand is also provided with more specific content standards for particular grade levels. Finally, separate documents outline reading, analysis, and writing skills for grades 6-8, 9-10, and 11-12.

Notably, Oregon now requires its high school students to take a semester of Civics, though it still doesn't require a course in U.S. History.

Civics: D-

In Brief

Instead of providing educators with clear and specific guidance, Oregon’s civics standards offer vague and poorly worded exhortations.

Content and Rigor: 1/7

K–8

In the early grades, Oregon’s civics and government standards focus on the importance of rules and the cultivation of civic dispositions. But it doesn’t take long for things get off track. For example, one first grade standard asks students to do the following:

Identify and apply civic virtues (such as equality, freedom, liberty, respect for individual rights, diversity, equity, justice, and deliberation) when interacting with classmates, families, and the school community (1.2).

Although it’s admirable that Oregon expects students to “apply” their freedom on the playground, their efforts may be hampered by the fact that freedom is a social *ideal* rather than an individual *virtue* (as are both justice and equality). Furthermore, it might be helpful for students to *know* and perhaps even *understand* concepts such as “individual rights” and “equity” (which is never defined) before applying them.

As this example suggests, the wording of many of Oregon’s standards is sloppy. Still, the biggest problem is that the standards are vague where they should be specific. For example, one third-grade standard expects students to “describe the responsibilities of people in their community and state” (3.2), but declines to elaborate. Similarly, a fourth grade standard asks students to “investigate how the establishment, organization, and function of the Oregon government, its Constitution and its laws enforced and/or violated democratic conceptions of equity and justice for individuals and groups including Native Americans, African-Americans, Asian-Americans, and other immigrant groups” (4.1). But of course, there would be no need for investigation if the state were willing to divulge some specifics about

its government’s organization (for example, that it has three branches of government) and functions (for example, protecting the environment).

Things get even worse in fifth grade, where one standard suggests that students “analyze how cooperation and conflict among people contribute to political, economic, religious, and current social events and situations in the United States” (5.1). A worthier goal is articulated in a standard asking students to “identify the mechanisms of power and the principles of democracy found in the ideas and laws of the founding documents of the U.S. Government” (5.4). However, in the absence of *any* specific principles—for example, rule of law, limited government, due process, and equal protection—this standard is also an open invitation for the educator to insert her own preferences, biases, and misapprehensions.

The standards for grades 6 and 7, which focus on world history, are nebulous. For example, the first seventh grade standard asks students to “describe the role of citizens in governments” (7.1).

Eighth grade is a little better. For example, students are asked to “compare and contrast the Articles of Confederation to the U.S. Constitution” (8.1), as well as “compare and contrast the United States’ republican form of government to direct democracy, theocracy, oligarchy, authoritarianism, and monarchy” (8.11). Alas, they are also expected to “compare historical and contemporary means of changing societies and identify individuals and/or groups promoting the common good including the importance of advocacy and activism related to socio-economic resistance (i.e. civil rights, LGBTQ+ rights, worker’s rights) for the expansion of justice, equality, and equity for individuals and/or groups of previously historically underrepresented groups” (8.9). Even if one supports the goals of this standard, it provides no practical guidance.

High School

Oregon’s standards for its high school course in civics and government fit on a single page. Like the standards for lower grades, they are often indefensibly broad and vague. For example, the first high school standard asks students to “analyze the positive and negative implications of the U.S. Constitution, Bill of Rights and Amendments, Supreme Court

decisions, Federal Laws, and executive orders, for political, legal, economic, and social equality for all, including traditionally marginalized groups” (HS.1).

Similarly, a standard that asks students to “examine institutions, functions, and processes of United States government” (HS.6) could easily contain some brief references to the three branches of government and how a bill becomes a law. Yet it doesn’t, nor does any other standard.

Although the words “traditionally marginalized groups” appear seventeen times in the Oregon standards, the following words are nowhere to be found: rule of law, separation of powers, checks and balances, federalism, due process, equal protection, trial, jury, legislation, Congress, regulation, President, Electoral College, gerrymandering, campaign finance, and election.

Strengths & Weaknesses of the Oregon Civics Standards

Strengths

1. A few individual standards are defensible.

Weaknesses

1. Oregon’s standards largely fail to specify actual civics and government content.
2. What little content exists focuses almost exclusively on inequity and injustice—valid concerns but hardly the only problems facing the United States.
3. Many standards are vague, overbroad, and/or poorly worded.
4. There is little discernible effort to cultivate essential skills or dispositions.

Skills and Dispositions

In addition to content standards for social studies, Oregon also provides separate documents providing associated reading, analysis, and writing skills for grades 6–8, 9–10, and 11–12. These skills are, unquestionably, defined more successfully than civic knowledge (which is very nearly absent). However, there is no apparent effort to connect them to the analysis of current events or issues.

Oregon’s civics and government standards make a token effort to inculcate civic dispositions through the third grade (“identify opportunities for student participation in local and regional issues,” 3.3) but then abandon the topic altogether.

Clarity and Organization: 2/3

Oregon’s social sciences standards are navigable, listing the various strands grade by grade with their associated content standards. However, it’s not clear how the many strands are meant to be deployed, particularly at the high school level—that is, whether they are meant to be individual discipline-specific courses or a continued Social Sciences course in which the stands are combined (and because there’s no introductory material, such organizational questions are left unanswered).

Presumably, the high school standards for “Civics and Government” are meant to map to the new high school civics requirement. But now that the requirement exists, they should make that explicit (in addition to revising the content).

U.S. History: F

In Brief

Oregon specifies a three-part U.S. History sequence across grades 5, 8, and high school but does almost nothing to define content for those courses. The focus on historically marginalized groups is hammered home almost to the exclusion of other topics.

Content and Rigor: 1/7

K–8

Oregon’s social studies standards for the early grades focus unambitiously on basic concepts of chronology and on students’ connections to their families, schools, and communities. Repeated lists of multicultural groups are the closest thing to specific content before grade 4, which adds a few extremely broad content standards on Oregon history.

The U.S. History sequence begins in grade 5, which ostensibly covers the period from 1492 to 1786. However, the entire historical knowledge strand consists of nine extremely broad standards, one of which is another checklist of minority groups. The entire Colonial era is reduced to a single standard that suggests students “locate and examine the 13 British colonies that became the United States and identify the early founders and describe daily life (political, social, and economic organization and structure)” (5.17). The American Revolution is only covered by the expectation that students “explain multiple perspectives and probable causes and effects of events leading to Colonial independence from British Rule” (5.18).

Similar items provide cursory coverage of precontact Native American cultures, European exploration and settlement, settler-Indian contact, the role of Indians “in the development of the United States,” and “how the decisions of those in power affected those with less political/economic power in past and current movements for equality, freedom, and justice with connections to the present-day reality” (5.22).

After two years of World History in grades 6 and 7, U.S. History resumes in grade 8, which covers the period from 1776 to Reconstruction. This time, there are only eight standards under “historical knowledge.” One deals with “continuity and change over the course of U.S. History” (8.22). Another deals with “the impact of intersectionality on what constitutes identity” (8.25). Another deals with “historically underrepresented groups in Oregon, the United States, and the world”—despite the ostensible focus on U.S. History (8.27). Another deals with “systemic oppression” in “the Colonial and Modern era”—but *not* the period between 1776 and Reconstruction (8.28). Yet another focuses on the events that *led* to independence (8.26).

These nonspecific references to diversity and struggle leave just *four* standards for the aforementioned time period. The first, “Evaluate the continuity and change over the course of United States history by analyzing the key people and events from the 1780s through Reconstruction” (8.23), amounts to an injunction to “study U.S. History.” Westward expansion is handled similarly. And the final item covers “forms of resistance utilized by enslaved people, including self emancipation, sabotage, and rebellion” (8.29).

The words “Civil War” appear only once in the Oregon standards, in a footnote.

High School

At the high school level, the “historical knowledge” strand covers both U.S. History from Reconstruction to the present *and* world history and seeks to do so in just fifteen content standards. Of these, at least seven address identity, traditionally marginalized groups, and systemic oppression.

Strengths & Weaknesses of the Oregon U.S. History Standards

Strengths

1. The “historical thinking” and “social science analysis” strands, as well as the ELA literacy standards, do a reasonable job of defining history related research and analytical skills.

Weaknesses

1. Oregon’s history standards largely fail to outline any actual U.S. History.
2. Many standards are too broad and vague to provide any real guidance.
3. The U.S. History sequence is flawed, relegating the crucial early American period to grade 5.
4. Instead of specific and balanced coverage of essential topics such as slavery and Civil Rights, the standards offer copious virtue signaling.

The other eight content items are even more nebulous than the K–8 standards. “Evaluate continuity and change over the course of world and United States history” (HS.52) could easily serve as a parody of substance-free standards. A barely intelligible directive to “analyze the complexity of the interaction of multiple perspectives to investigate causes and effects of significant events in the development of world, U.S., and Oregon history” (HS.53) is no better. Other items mention world religions, “scientific and technological innovations, political theory, and art and literature,” as well as “fundamental political debates,” conflict and compromise, “social, labor, and political movements in history,” and Indian history and sovereignty in Oregon and the U.S.

There is no hint of any specific historical issue or event for the period after Reconstruction (or, for that matter, for world history)—just inexcusably general injunctions to learn and analyze history and repeated invocations of diversity, oppression, and inequality. These are valid concerns, but repeatedly hammering them home almost to the exclusion of all else (and without providing any specifics) is unlikely to have the intended effect.

Skills Development

Compared to the almost nonexistent content standards, skills are reasonably well handled in the “historical thinking” and “social science analysis” strands. In early grades, these focus on concepts of chronology and basic understanding of historical sources. More complex sources and research skills are gradually introduced, along with a potentially useful instruction to explain why historical contemporaries from different groups (“e.g., socioeconomic, ethnic, and religious groups and other traditionally marginalized groups”) might differ “in the way they viewed and interpreted historical events”—an appeal to view the past in context (3.14). Primary and secondary sources build to multiple sources and perspectives by grade 8, although an instruction to explore past biases “in order to question the dominant narratives in history” is a touch tendentious.

In addition to social studies content standards, Oregon also offers separate documents providing associated reading, analysis, and writing skills for grades 6–8, 9–10, and 11–12. Overall, skills are defined more successfully than historical knowledge—which is very nearly absent.

Clarity and Organization: 1/3

As noted under Civics, Oregon’s standards are visually usable but lack any introductory or explanatory material defining how the various strands are meant to be used and integrated.

The U.S. History sequence is fairly clear, as the history strand is consistently labeled with a topic for the grade or band. However, there is almost no specific historical content.

Recommendations

Civics

- 1. Bolster the high school course** (e.g., by adding standards that specifically address the rule of law, the separation of powers, federalism, due process, civil liberties, equal protection, and the nuts and bolts of the electoral process).
- 2. Ensure that each of the three branches of government is covered in appropriate depth** (e.g., by giving each branch its own, discrete, nuanced standard in fifth grade and at the high school level).

U.S. History

- 1. Offer two full courses in U.S. History** (one in the elementary grades and a second, more advanced course in high school).
- 2. Specifically require that high school students take a course in U.S. History to graduate.**

Both Subjects

- 1. Provide much more specific and concrete guidance.**
- 2. Reduce the number of standards that are devoted to ethnic studies and strike a more reasonable balance between *pluribus* and *unum*.**

Documents Reviewed

- “Oregon 2021 Social Science Standards Integrated with Ethnic Studies,” 2021, <https://www.oregon.gov/ode/educator-resources/standards/socialsciences/Documents/2021%20Social%20Science%20Standards%20Integrated%20with%20Ethnic%20Studies.pdf>
- “Common Core State Standards, Oregon: Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies, Grades 6–8,” <https://www.oregon.gov/ode/educator-resources/standards/socialsciences/Documents/history-6-8.pdf>
- “Common Core State Standards, Oregon: Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies, Grades 9–10,” <https://www.oregon.gov/ode/educator-resources/standards/socialsciences/Documents/history-9-10.pdf>
- “Common Core State Standards, Oregon: Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies, Grades 11–12,” <https://www.oregon.gov/ode/educator-resources/standards/socialsciences/Documents/history-11-12.pdf>

Pennsylvania

A	Exemplary	10
	Standards worthy of implementation	9
B	Good	8
	Targeted revisions recommended	7
C	Mediocre	6
	Significant revisions strongly recommended	5
D	Inadequate	4
F	Complete revision recommended before implementation	3
		2
		0–1

Civics: F

Content & Rigor: 2/7

Clarity & Organization: 0/3

Total Score: 2/10

U.S. History: F

Content & Rigor: 1/7

Clarity & Organization: 0/3

Total Score: 1/10

Overview

Pennsylvania’s standards for civics and U.S. History are inadequate. Such civics content as exists is exceedingly broad, vague, and repetitive—and the U.S. History standards don’t contain any actual U.S. History. A complete revision is recommended.

Description of the Standards

Pennsylvania divides social studies into four strands: civics and government, economics, geography, and history. Each strand is divided into three documents, for the K–3, 3–8, and 9–12 grade bands (though grade 3 appears in *both* the K–3 and 3–8 documents). Some documents are marked “DRAFT” at the bottom, and those from 2009 are marked as “voluntary resources” pending action by the state Board of Education—although the state lists the documents as academic standards on its website, so they are presumably held to be in effect.

Each strand is divided into multiple “standard categories” that are subdivided into “standard statements” (which are also identical in all grade bands). Charts within each grade band then assign content expectations to the statements for each grade or course, if applicable, and some expectations are supplied with bulleted lists of subitems. Confusingly, the documents for grades 9–12 specify standards for grades 9 and 12 *and* for subject-specific courses in U.S. History, world history, and civics/government. Moreover, the high school civics and U.S. History

documents are identical save for the title and introductory material: both include standards for all high school courses. (Notably, Pennsylvania is one of a handful of states that don't specifically require that high school students take courses in U.S. History or Civics.)

In addition to the core standards, the state website offers separate documents with reading and writing skills for social studies that are derived from the Common Core State Standards for grades 6–12.

Civics: F

In Brief

For a state that gave the nation Benjamin Franklin, Lucretia Mott, and George Marshall, Pennsylvania's civics standards are a major disappointment. The content expectations are broadly worded. The skills are boilerplate. The goal of producing active and informed citizens can hardly be detected. Finally, the standards themselves are needlessly difficult to use.

Content and Rigor: 2/7

K–8

In grades pre-K–2, the standards introduce students to the concept of rules and the subset of rules that have the status of law. The sphere of communities in which students find themselves is gradually enlarged from family and classroom to school and community. Students are expected to know the authority figures in their lives and to understand the reason for having elected officials. The standards address elections and the responsibility of voters after the vote (Standard 5.3.2.J).

The generality of Pennsylvania's civics standards begins to manifest itself in third grade, where the standards suddenly call on students to “define” the principles of liberty, justice, equality, and democracy that shape local government—a somewhat odd assignment—and to identify the “key ideas about government” in the Declaration of Independence,

U.S. Constitution and Bill of Rights, and Pennsylvania Constitution (Standards 5.1.3.C, D)—a monumental task without more direction than the standards provide. The standards also want students to identify the “rights of an American citizen”—without guidance on whether the rights are political or civil, substantive or procedural, constitutional or statutory (Standard 5.1.3.E). One standard that asks students to describe “the sources of conflict and disagreement” encompasses most of the human experience (Standard 5.2.3B).

In fourth grade, students are asked to identify services performed by local and state governments. However, no other new material is introduced, nor is there any identifiable theme for the grade.

Fifth grade adds a modest amount of new material—again, in the broadest terms. Students are to describe the “purposes of school, community, state, and national government” (Standard 5.1.5.B); identify individual rights guaranteed by the state and federal constitutions (Standard 5.1.5.E); and understand how rule of law protects property rights, individual rights, and the common good (Standard 5.1.5.A). The glossary defines rule of law as the “principle that every member of a society, even a ruler, must follow the law,” but this definition ignores the possibility that the law itself may not provide equal protection to citizens and rulers.

Sixth grade adds content in a manner that doesn't clearly distinguish it from fifth grade, seventh grade, or eighth grade. Students are expected to explain the roles played by the Framers in the Declaration, Constitution, Bill of Rights, and Pennsylvania Constitution; compare the role and structure of local, state, and national governments; describe the services provided by the national government; explain how courts resolve disputes; describe the influence of mass media; and describe the process for registering and voting in primary and general elections. Seventh grade then introduces political parties—their leadership positions, the closed Pennsylvania state primary system, and the role of party affiliation at all government levels. It also expects students to identify the types of local, state, and national taxes.

The standards for eighth grade begin with the goal that students “understand the sources of rule of law” (Standard 5.1.8.A). This could mean almost anything, but it certainly does not mean that students and teachers are specifically

directed to Sophocles' *Antigone*, James Otis's argument against general warrants, or the *Magna Carta*, the Petition of Right, and the English Bill of Rights.

Students in eighth grade are expected to compare the policy-making processes, court systems, and powers of the three branches of state and federal government. Internationally, they are to compare democracy and totalitarianism and be familiar with the "foreign policy tools" of diplomacy, economic and military aid, economic sanctions, and treaties (but not military force).

High School

The civics standards for ninth grade appear to define a basic course in government. They include different systems of government, checks and balances among the three branches of the U.S. government, an examination of how government agencies create and enforce policies, the role of the U.S. Supreme Court in interpreting the U.S. Constitution, the importance of a free press, the influence of interest groups and mass media, the different election processes for local, state, and national office, how citizens can participate in political parties and campaigns in addition to voting, the role of symbols in civil disobedience and patriotic activities, political leadership and public service in a "republican form of government" (defined differently in the glossary than its meaning in the Constitution), and how it is possible for the Pennsylvania and U.S. constitutions to coexist.

Shockingly, the standards for the U.S. History course from 1850 to present contain almost no specific civics content. There is a single reference to "landmark U.S. Supreme Court interpretation of the Constitution and Amendments" (Standard 5.3.U.F.). However, there is no reference to *Marbury, McCullough*, or *Dred Scott*, nor is there any mention of the debate over the nature of the Union before the Civil War, the Reconstruction Amendments, the Progressive movement and its amendments, the Great Depression and New Deal, the effect of war on civil liberties, the Civil Rights movement, or the growth of the federal government and the increased power of the executive branch within it.

Similarly, the standards for the World History course from 1450 to present contain almost no specific civics content. Although they refer to nationalism and the philosophical argument over the necessity of government (Standards 5.1.W.B,F), they contain no reference to the rise of the

nation-state, the separation of religious and secular authority, the Enlightenment, the development of theories and practices that limited absolute power, natural rights, contract theory, the rise of popular sovereignty, or the idea of a written constitution as higher law.

Because the wording of the Pennsylvania standards is so broad, the content of the standards for high school civics and government largely duplicates the content of the civics standards for eighth grade and ninth grade. Perhaps the *level* at which the material should be taught is meant to be higher in this course, but if so, that isn't apparent from the standards. For example, one standard asks students to evaluate state and federal powers based on the Declaration of Independence, the U.S. and Pennsylvania constitutions, and "other critical sources" (Standard 5.1.C.D).

In twelfth grade, the replacement of words like "identify" and "explain" with words like "evaluate" and "analyze" in the standards for civics and government suggests a new level of thinking. However, although this is certainly a welcome development, there is no reason it could not have begun sooner. Among the issues subjected to this treatment are

Strengths & Weaknesses of the Pennsylvania Civics Standards

Strengths

1. There is some coverage of basic government concepts in ninth grade.

Weaknesses

1. Many standards are broad and repetitive.
2. There is no apparent logic to the sequence of civics material.
3. The absence of any U.S. History means a great deal of civics content is also missing.
4. The expectations that relate to civic skills and dispositions are academic and uninspiring.

changes in power and authority among the three branches of government, the fairness and effectiveness of U.S. electoral processes (including the Electoral College), the tax policies of various states and countries, and the effectiveness of America’s foreign policy tools (although it’s refreshing to see the terms “realism” and “idealism” defined and used in discussing foreign policy).

Skills and Dispositions

Aside from the Common Core standards for reading and writing in history and social studies (CCSS), the text of Pennsylvania’s civics standards devotes almost no time to the development of critical thinking skills. Although the Common Core standards are excellent, they are separate from the civics standards, and the civics standards don’t refer to them—nor do they make any attempt to define skills that concern civics specifically. In an age where information comes from every quarter, for example, greater emphasis should be placed on developing the skill to assess the reliability of information. Similarly, in an age of groupthink and confirmation bias, greater emphasis should be placed on consideration of one’s own biases and predilections.

The discussion of citizenship is frustratingly academic. In the early years, students repeatedly “identify” problems of interpersonal conflict and discuss possible solutions,¹ but only once do they “attempt to solve” them (Standard 5.2.1.B). Similarly, elementary and middle school students “describe” and “analyze” how individuals can participate in school and community activities for the common good,² but it’s only in ninth grade that they are expected to “demonstrate” their citizenship.³ In short, there is no felt sense that Pennsylvania wants to motivate its students to make their country or the world a better place to live.

Clarity and Organization: 0/3

Educators who want to understand what grade-level material they are responsible for covering must read vertically rather than horizontally, yet each individual column of grade-level content is spread across roughly a dozen pages (ten pages for grades pre-K–3, fifteen pages for grades 3–8, and fourteen pages for grades 9–12). This is not an intuitive way to present material. Furthermore, there is no stated theme for any grade before high school, nor is the logic by which new material is added (or old material is

revisited) readily apparent. Indeed, even the status of the various documents that appear on the DOE is unclear, with some marked “DRAFT” at the bottom and others labeled as “a voluntary resource.”

Perhaps most important, there is enormous repetition across grade levels. For example, Kindergarten students are expected to “identify the roles of firefighters,” while first-grade students “identify the value of firefighters” (Standards 5.3.K.C and 5.3.1.C). Similarly, first-grade students “identify other services provided by local government,” while those in second grade “identify services performed by...local government” (Standards 5.3.2.C and 5.3.3.C). Between grades 4 and 8, students “identify” and “interpret” key ideas, and “explain” and “summarize” basic principles found in significant documents such as the Declaration of Independence, Constitution and Bill of Rights, and Pennsylvania Constitution⁴—but only in general terms. Finally, students in grades 9–12 are expected to “explain the Supreme Court’s role in interpreting the U.S. Constitution,” “analyze landmark Supreme Court interpretations of the Constitution,” “explain the Supreme Court’s role,” and “analyze landmark...Supreme Court interpretations.”⁵ This level of generality and repetition makes it impossible to tell how individual grades are supposed to differ from one another (and, thus, what is actually expected).

U.S. History: F

In Brief

Beyond vague conceptual generalizations, Pennsylvania simply does not offer U.S. History standards. No content is outlined. Sequence is barely even suggested.

Content and Rigor: 1/7

K–8

Pennsylvania urges that its standards not be taken as “a list of facts to recall,” but there is little risk of that happening. The standards are meant to promote critical analysis, but it’s not clear of what, as there is almost no specific content—historical or otherwise—in the standards documents.

The history strand is divided, in all grade bands, into four standard categories: historical analysis and skills development, Pennsylvania history, U.S. History, and world history. The Pennsylvania, U.S., and world history categories are divided in all bands into the same four standard statements: “contributions of individuals and groups,” “historical documents and artifacts,” “impact of continuity and change,” and “conflict and cooperation.” Were the state to attempt a substantive chronological outlining, this purely thematic arrangement would greatly undermine that effort—but no such attempt has been made.

Even for the age range, the content expectations in early grades expect very little. Students are to identify unspecified individuals and groups who impacted U.S. History and to consider unspecified landmarks, artifacts, and documents. By grade 3, they are to discuss “social, political, cultural, and economic” contributions of individuals and groups (Standard 8.3.3.A) and consider conflict and cooperation on such issues as ethnicity/race, working conditions, immigration, military conflict, and economic stability—again without examples (the Pennsylvania history category is similarly arranged and similarly devoid of content).

There are few changes in the 4–8 grade band, and the expectations remain completely abstract and conceptual. The only noticeable addition is a list of bulleted categories under continuity and change—identical across the grade band—including belief systems and religions; commerce and industry; technology, politics, and government; physical and human geography; and social organizations. There is no hint of actual history. Sequence and scope are a total mystery, as no grade specifies a single event, individual, or date. Students are to consider the social, political, cultural, and economic contributions of individuals and groups; the importance of documents, artifacts, and places; how continuity and change have impacted U.S. History; and how conflict and cooperation have impacted U.S. growth and development.

A general directive to “learn American history” would be almost as useful (and save space).

High School

Although the U.S. History course is labeled “1850–present,” the actual content expectations are almost identical to those in grades 9 and 12 (which Pennsylvania outlines separately

from the subject-specific high school courses), as well as those in grades 4–8. Consequently, it is entirely unclear what is meant to be taught when. As in grades 4–8, there is no reference to any actual history—just the same conceptual directives, bulleted lists of things that continue or change (belief systems, technology, politics, etc.), and sources of conflict or cooperation (ethnicity and race, immigration, military conflict, etc.). The fact that the Pennsylvania history category offers content expectations for the U.S. History course (as well as for grades 9 and 12) suggests that it is meant to be included. But like the U.S. History category, it offers no substantive content.

In short, Pennsylvania’s standards declare an intent “to give students throughout Pennsylvania a common cultural literacy.” But in fact, they do the opposite. Not a single piece of actual American history is mentioned at any level—not even the American Revolution or the Civil War.

Skills Development

The first standard category in the history strand is “historical analysis and skills development,” which is divided in turn into “continuity and change over time,” “fact/opinion and points of view,” and “research.” Expectations in early grades are brief and broad but do introduce concepts of chronology, distinguishing fact from opinion, multiple points of view, primary sources, identifying sources, and a teacher-guided inquiry project by grade 3. Secondary sources are noted by grade 5 and joined with primary sources by grade 6.

Strengths & Weaknesses of the Pennsylvania U.S. History Standards

Strengths

1. History-related skills are stated briefly, but they do touch on important points.

Weaknesses

1. There is no history in the U.S. History standards.
2. The U.S. History sequence is all but undetectable.

Expectations remain brief and general, but students are expected by grade 8 to produce “an organized product” on an assigned historical topic “that presents and reflects on a thesis statement” and relies on appropriate primary and secondary sources. Finally, high school history skills emphasize context, fact vs. opinion, multiple perspectives, and independent research, though the expectations remain brief.

In addition to the skills in the core social studies documents, the state website also offers reading and writing skills for social studies for grades 6–12 from the CCSS ELA materials. These materials, which are incorporated or invoked by several states, are of high quality, stressing close reading through a historical lens and written presentation of research. However, the actual standards documents fail to mention them.

Clarity and Organization: 0/3

As discussed in the Civics section of this review, the presentation of the Pennsylvania standards is deeply unhelpful, and their rigidly thematic organization precludes substantive historical outlining.

U.S. History scope and sequence are almost a total mystery. The empty conceptual generalizations that comprise the bulk of the standards are nearly identical over many grades, providing no indication of what should be taught when. The title of the high school course (“1850–present”) provides the only suggestion of specific content coverage. Yet it remains completely unclear what U.S. History is meant to be covered in grades 9 and 12, which have basically the same content items as the high school U.S. History course. Presumably, some coverage of the pre-1850 timespan is intended for the elementary and middle school grades, but there is no way to know from the information provided.

Recommendations

Civics

1. Provide much more specific content guidance.
2. Align the K-8 civics content with the U.S. History sequence (see below).

U.S. History

1. Provide substantive guidance to promote shared exposure to essential content.
2. Offer two full passes through U.S. History, one in elementary school and a second in higher grades.

Both Subjects

1. Ensure that each grade or course has a clear focus and organize content accordingly.
2. Provide separate standards documents for each grade level or course.
3. Specifically require that high school students take at least one year of U.S. History and one semester of civics.

Documents Reviewed

- “Academic Standards for Civics and Government,” Primary Grades (2012); Elementary and Secondary Grades (2009); <https://www.pdesas.org/Page/Viewer/ViewPage/11/>
- “Academic Standards for History,” Primary Grades (2012); Elementary and Secondary Grades (2009); <https://www.pdesas.org/Page/Viewer/ViewPage/11/>
- “Academic Standards for Reading in History and Social Studies, Grades 6–12,” 2014, <https://www.pdesas.org/Page/Viewer/ViewPage/11/>
- “Academic Standards for Writing in History and Social Studies, Grades 6–12,” 2014, <https://www.pdesas.org/Page/Viewer/ViewPage/11/>

ENDNOTES

1. Standards 5.2.PK.B, 5.2.K.B, 5.2.2.B, and 5.2.3.B.
2. Standards 5.2.3.D, 5.2.4.D, 5.2.5.D, 5.2.6.D, 5.2.7.D, and 5.2.8.D.
3. Standards 5.2.U.D, 5.2.W.D, 5.2.C.D, and 5.2.12.D.
4. Standards 5.1.4.D, 5.1.5.D, 5.1.6.D, 5.1.7.D, and 5.1.8.D.
5. Standards 5.3.9.F, 5.3.U.F, 5.3.W.F, and 5.3.12.F.

Rhode Island

A	Exemplary	10
	Standards worthy of implementation	9
B	Good	8
	Targeted revisions recommended	7
C	Mediocre	6
	Significant revisions strongly recommended	5
D	Inadequate	4
F	Complete revision recommended before implementation	3
		2
		0-1

Civics: D

Content & Rigor: 3/7

Clarity & Organization: 1/3

Total Score: 4/10

U.S. History: F

Content & Rigor: 1/7

Clarity & Organization: 0/3

Total Score: 1/10

Overview

Rhode Island's civics and U.S. History standards are inadequate. Bad organization and vague and repetitive indicators lead to a dearth of specific civics content, and there is no U.S. History whatsoever. A complete revision is recommended before implementation.

Description of the Standards

Rhode Island's "Grade Span Expectations for Social Studies" (GSEs) include standards for K-2, 3-4, 5-6, 7-8, and high school, as well as "high school extended learning" that goes "beyond proficiency." The GSEs are divided into four strands: civics and government, historical perspectives/Rhode Island history, geography, and economics. Each strand is subdivided into three to five "Statements of Enduring Knowledge." These in turn are subdivided into "GSE Stems," which are furnished with "Specific Indicators" for each grade band.

A second set of resources called "Grade Span Specific Documents" replicates the Statements of Enduring Knowledge, GSE Stems, and Specific Indicators but adds two new columns: essential questions and potential topics/resources. The latter include relevant intersections with the Common Core English Language Arts standards, as well as lists of particular people, places, events, and texts.

Notably, Rhode Island is one of a handful of states that don't specifically require U.S. history or Civics course-work at the high school level.

Civics: D

In Brief

Although there are a few bright spots, many of Rhode Island's civics standards are too broad and vague to provide much useful guidance—and their organization leaves much to be desired.

Content and Rigor: 3/7

K-8

Once one gets past the byzantine organization of Rhode Island's standards, one can find some key content laced throughout the K-8 civics and government GSEs. For example, asking grade K-2 students to "explore examples of services (e.g., post office, police, fire, [and] garbage collection) provided in their own community" is a useful and age-appropriate exercise demonstrating the concrete functions of government (C&G 1 K-2 1c). Similarly, one expectation for grades 5-6 that deals with "conflicts between individual rights and the common good" includes references to "eminent domain, airport expansion, Scituate Reservoir, [and] Coastal Access" (C&G 3 5-6 1d). Finally, students in grades 7-8 are expected to use "a variety of sources to identify and defend a position on a democratic principle (e.g., self-government in Declaration of Independence, women's rights in Seneca Falls Declaration, Habeas Corpus in Laws of 12 Tables, [and] freedom of religion in Washington's letter to the Touro Synagogue)."

In each of the cases mentioned, the inclusion of specific and substantive examples is helpful. Yet many standards are too vague or broad to provide much useful direction. For example, students in grades K-2 are expected to use "a variety of print and nonprint sources to explore other people and places" (C&G 5 K-2 2a), which could mean almost anything. Similarly, seventh and eighth graders are tasked with explaining "how geography and economics influence

the structure of government" (C&G 1 7-8 1d) and identifying "the impact of an historic court case" (C&G 3 7-8 2c). But no examples are provided.

In addition to being vague and broad, the wording of many standards is confusing—and, in some cases, worrying. For example, third- and fourth-grade students are expected to identify "the levels (local, state, national) and three branches of government, as defined by the *U.S. Constitution*, and the roles and purposes of each (e.g., checks and balances)." But the Constitution doesn't define the role of local government, and "checks and balances" is neither a "role" nor a "purpose." Similarly, one standard suggests that students in grades 7 and 8 demonstrate "what happens when political structures do or do not meet the needs of people (e.g., democracy v. anarchy)" (C&G 1 7-8 1c). But anarchy isn't the opposite of democracy, and it isn't the inevitable consequence of failing to meet a people's needs.

And so forth.

High School

Rhode Island's high school standards do an even worse job of referencing essential content than the state's K-8 standards. For example, one standard obliquely suggests that students "identify and give examples of the discrepancies between democratic ideals and the realities of American social and political life (e.g., equal protection under the law and the reality of discrimination)" (C&G 2 9-12 2c). Surely some reference to Jim Crow, Indian removal, or other such "discrepancies" would be in order here, yet none is included.

Why only some standards provide useful illustrative content isn't clear. But without it, many high school standards are hopelessly broad, and what specific content does exist is often problematic. For example, one standard suggests that students interpret and analyze "the sources of the U.S. democratic tradition in the Declaration of Independence, U.S. Constitution, and other documents (e.g., RI Constitution, Seneca Falls Declaration of Sentiments & Resolutions, Supreme Court decisions, [and] Pledge of Allegiance)." Perhaps the intention was to write "such as the Declaration of Independence," but that's not what the standard says. Nor is it clear which "Supreme Court cases" the document is referring to or why they are lumped in with the Pledge of Allegiance, the Declaration of Independence, and the Rhode Island constitution.

Of the five major GSEs for this age range, the third—addressing the rights and responsibilities in a democracy—is perhaps best addressed (C&G 3). It includes references to debates over the living wage versus the minimum wage, flag burning and the First Amendment, and the International Convention on the Rights of the Child. Yet the organization of the content is still chaotic and incredibly uneven.

In theory, Rhode Island’s division of standards into those that pertain to “high school proficiency” and those that pertain to “high school extended learning” (or “learning that goes beyond proficiency”) would be a useful tool for educators looking to accelerate or differentiate instruction. However, in practice, most of the boxes for “extended learning” are empty, and those standards that do exist seem more suited to defining proficiency than going beyond it.

Often, the extended-learning indicator only highlights the general lack of rigor. For example, high school students are asked to “identify a policy at the school, local, state,

national, or international level and describe how it affects individual rights” (C&G 3 9–12 2a). However, the corresponding extended learning standard asks students to “evaluate, take, and defend a position regarding a policy.” In addition to being hopelessly broad, the grade 9–12 indicator is unacceptably undemanding, requiring only that students identify and describe a policy (any policy!). Every student can and should take and defend a position on a public policy that is important to them. In fact, doing so is the bare minimum that should be expected.

Skills and Dispositions

The Rhode Island standards do address some critical thinking skills, particularly as they relate to identifying reliable and suspect sources of information. For example, seventh and eighth graders are to “utilize a variety of reliable sources to develop an informed opinion.” Similarly, high schoolers are to “evaluat[e] possible bias/propaganda or conflicting information within or across sources.” However, most of the skills related to advocacy¹ are reserved for “extended” high school learning—for example, “critically examining the criteria used for admission to citizenship in the U.S” and “evaluating, taking, and defending positions on provisions found in the Bill of Rights.” In theory, such activities could be engaging for students, but tagging them as expectations that are “beyond proficiency” suggests that most students won’t have the opportunity.

To its credit, Rhode Island does make a muddled attempt to address civic dispositions. In particular, multiple expectations emphasize respect for other people and opinions.² For example, the expectations for grades K–2 include a reference to “exhibiting respect such as waiting one’s turn,” and those for grades 3–4 stress the importance of “exhibiting respect for self, parents, teachers, [and] authority figures.” Similarly, participation in civil society is stressed—for example, students in grades 3–4 are expected to “engag[e] in various forms of participation (e.g., voting, petition, [and] survey).”

Strengths & Weaknesses of the Rhode Island Civics Standards

Strengths

1. Key content sometimes buttresses largely skills-based standards in grades K–8.
2. Some standards do an adequate job addressing critical thinking and civic dispositions.

Weaknesses

1. The organization of the standards is chaotic.
2. Many individual standards are too broad, vague, or poorly worded to provide useful guidance.
3. Some essential content is missing.
4. In general, expectations are too low—especially in high school, where the expectations reserved for “extended learning” barely approach what is typically associated with proficiency.

Clarity and Organization: 1/3

As noted, the manner in which civics content is organized is chaotic, with disparate ideas and documents thrown together seemingly at random. Some individual expectations lack examples. Others overlap with one another (for

example, there are numerous expectations on the three branches of government, none of which is particularly clear). In general, the reliance on “stems” that repeat verbatim across grade bands makes the standards difficult to read and limits the content in unhelpful ways. Finally, the fact that Rhode Island’s civics standards provide no guidance for individual grade levels means the risk of repetition or omission within the grade bands is high. Similarly, the fact that many expectations are repeated almost verbatim from one grade band to the next means that some content will be taught repeatedly—though not, one suspects, strategically.

A complementary set of resources called “Grade Span Specific Documents” largely replicate the key GSE document.

U.S. History: F

In Brief

Rhode Island provides no U.S. History standards. Instead, the state explains that “it is expected that local social studies curriculum frameworks would also include other strands, such as culture, world history, and U.S. History.” By focusing only on broad and often vague “big ideas,” the state abdicates its role in specifying core content.

Content and Rigor: 1/7

K–8

Rhode Island stresses that its GSEs “*are meant to capture the ‘big ideas’ of civics and history*” and “*are not intended to represent the full curriculum*” (emphasis in original). But no state’s standards are meant to serve as a full curriculum, and Rhode Island does claim “to identify the content knowledge and skills expected of all students.” Sadly, the GSEs do no such thing. “Content knowledge” is almost totally absent, and what little there is appears as scattered examples, devoid of context or historical structure.

The state does not assign any particular content to any individual grade level. Moreover, similar historical examples are often assigned to consecutive grade bands. There is no identifiable U.S. History sequence and no attempt at outlining the content to be taught.

Since the statements of Enduring Knowledge and GSE stems are identical for all grade bands, only the Specific Indicators change from band to band. The five Enduring Knowledge statements touch on history as an interpretive account of human activities, as a guide to understanding the present and future, and as events that are influenced by ideas and beliefs (among other broad statements). For grades K–4, the history strand’s (inaptly named) Specific Indicators invoke general concepts such as cause and effect, sequences of events, connections between past and present, personal connections to the past, innovations and inventions, diversity and cultural interaction, and so on. Rhode Island history is referred to several times, with a few random examples parenthetically noted, but broader U.S. History, by design, is barely mentioned.

In grades 5–8, the Specific Indicators remain nonspecific, invoking such points as “identifying key events and people of a particular historical era or time period” (HP2 7–8 2-a), “evaluating alternative courses of action (keeping in mind the context of the time)” (HP3 7–8 1-b), “providing historical examples of factors, causes, and reasons that lead to interactions” (HP4 5–6 2.b), and so forth. More references to specific history—both of the U.S. and Rhode Island—appear as parenthetical examples or as “potential topics/resources,” but there is no consistency or pattern (and Rhode Island history is again mentioned far more often than U.S. History).

Some specific items from U.S. History—chiefly, founding documents and political figures—are mentioned in the civics strand but, again, without historical context or structure. At each grade band and regardless of strand, the Essential Questions in the three grade-band documents (e.g., “How am I connected to the past?”) are broadly conceptual and supply no specific content.

High School

Rhode Island’s high school standards also omit U.S. History. The same Statements of Enduring Knowledge and GSE Stems appear as in other grade bands, and the new Specific Indicators remain entirely nonspecific, focused on concepts such as interpretation, cause and effect, “explaining origins of major historical events” (HP2 9–12 1.a), the impact of past events on the present, and so on. More historical examples are mentioned for high school, both parenthetically in the Specific Indicators and in the “potential topics/resources” column, than in the earlier grade-band documents, but they

remain scattered and fragmentary. Again, even among these historical scraps, a disproportionate number reference Rhode Island rather than the U.S. more broadly. As noted, the state envisions that “local social studies curriculum frameworks” will supply the U.S. History.

The high school band includes GSEs for high school proficiency and, for some high school Specific Indicators, GSEs for “extended learning.” As is the case with civics, the latter add no specifics about content or sequence. Instead, they ask students to “analyze” or “critique” points they are expected to “document” or “trace” in the core high school GSEs. As in the K–8 grades, the “essential questions” added in the three grade-band documents are purely conceptual and add no historical content.

As in the middle school bands, the high school civics strand’s “potential topics/resources” mention some American historical documents, events, and individuals. But again, there is a strong Rhode Island emphasis in the selected topics, and as always, there is no historical context or structure.

Skills Development

Although they contain no meaningful historical content, the purely thematic GSE Stems and Specific Indicators do invoke some history-related skills. Students are asked to “act as historians” using “artifacts and primary and secondary

sources” in all grade bands from K–2 onward (GSE Stem HP1–1). The difference between primary and secondary sources appears in the grade 3–4 Specific Indicators. However, skills-related expectations are sometimes vague. For example, by high school, students are to explain “how historical facts and historical interpretations may be different but are related” (HP1 9–12 1.b). Invocations of multiple historical perspectives, different versions of the same events, citation of examples and evidence, and the concept of counterfactual questions have some value but are not explained in any real depth.

Clarity and Organization: 0/3

As discussed in the Civics section, Rhode Island’s GSEs are poorly presented and substantively empty, with grade bands barely differentiated from each other and sequence a complete mystery.

Little can be said about the internal organization and chronological order of U.S. History specifically, as the GSEs say almost nothing about it, having been organized only by general conceptual themes.

Strengths & Weaknesses of the Rhode Island U.S. History Standards

Strengths

1. Rhode Island’s purely thematic approach does allow some invocation of history-related analytical skills.

Weaknesses

1. Guidance on historical content is totally absent.
2. No sequence is specified, and content is barely differentiated between grade bands.

Recommendations

Civics

1. Find another way to organize the content.
2. Add more detail and substantive examples.
3. Ensure that all high school students are exposed to the level of rigor reflected in the standards for extended learning (when they appear, that is).

U.S. History

1. Provide substantive content guidance to promote shared exposure to the fundamentals of U.S. History.

Both Subjects

1. Provide a suggested grade-level sequence for each grade band.
2. Consolidate overlapping GSE documents.

- 3. Specifically require that high school students take at least one year of U.S. History and one semester of Civics to graduate.** (Note that the absence of such requirements did not affect Rhode Island’s grades, which reflect the quality of its standards.)

Documents Reviewed

- Rhode Island Grade Span Expectations for Social Studies (“Social Studies GSEs”), 2008 and (HP 4–5) 2012, <https://www.ride.ri.gov/InstructionAssessment/CivicsSocialStudies.aspx>

Revisions to the Rhode Island social studies standards are currently underway.

ENDNOTES

1. As defined in the civics criteria, advocacy relates to a set of skills whereby “students should practice the art of persuasion in various formats and contexts, backing their opinions with evidence, responding thoughtfully to the opinions of others, and revising their own opinions when appropriate.”
2. See “Essential Dispositions” under the civics criteria in the Appendix.

South Carolina

A	Exemplary	10
	Standards worthy of implementation	9
B	Good	8
	Targeted revisions recommended	7
C	Mediocre	6
	Significant revisions strongly recommended	5
D	Inadequate	4
	Complete revision recommended before implementation	3
2		
0-1		

Civics: B

Content & Rigor: 5/7

Clarity & Organization: 2/3

Total Score: 7/10

U.S. History: B

Content & Rigor: 5/7

Clarity & Organization: 2/3

Total Score: 7/10

Overview

South Carolina’s civics and U.S. History standards are reasonably good. Supplementary materials add much-needed detail and narrative framing but are hamstrung by a largely skills-based approach to organization. Targeted revisions are recommended.

Description of the Standards¹

South Carolina’s social studies standards provide individual outlines for grades K–8 and for six high school courses, including two required courses, “U.S. Government” and “United States History and the Constitution.” Each grade or course includes a short introduction, followed by tables with “key concepts” that are divided into numbered standards. Each standard has an “enduring understanding,” followed by more specific numbered “indicators.” For grades K–2, the key concepts are standard social studies strands: history, geography, economics, and civics and government. Beginning in grade 3, each grade or course has a subject-specific focus, and key concepts are subject-specific concepts, regions, or historical periods. Skills are also “deconstructed” by grade level and cross-referenced to related indicators. Finally, supplemental “alignment guides” unpack each standard through an “expository narrative,” followed by “possible questions for inquiry” and discussions of each indicator’s purpose that are accompanied by examples of potential topics and bulleted lists of suggested content.

Civics: B

In Brief

The alignment guides for South Carolina’s civics standards reference a great deal of worthy content. But there are a few holes, and the skills-based approach to organization is needlessly confusing.

Content and Rigor: 5/7

K-8

In the early grades (K-2), South Carolina’s civics and government content focuses on developing civic dispositions (e.g., “compassion, cooperation, empathy, honesty, and respect”), a sense of civic identity, and familiarity with general governance structures and processes. In general, the topics are age appropriate, but at times the expectations seem overly ambitious. For example, first graders are expected to “describe the basic purpose, structure, and functions of South Carolina’s government at both the local and state level” (1.CG.2).

After a year of world geography, the fourth and fifth grades are devoted to a two-year survey of U.S. History and South Carolina Studies (see the U.S. History portion of the review). As one might hope, the alignment guides for these grades are rich in civics content. For example, standard two in grade 4 asks students to “analyze the sequence of events that led to the establishment of the U. S. as a democratic republic” (4.2.P), which is followed (in the alignment guide) by a bullet-pointed list of worthy content, including the Articles of Confederation, Federalists/Anti-Federalists, federalism/states’ rights, the Preamble to the Constitution, the Three-Fifths Compromise, the three branches of government, checks and balances, and the Bill of Rights (among other references). Similarly, the guidance for another grade 4 indicator on Reconstruction includes references to the Civil Rights Act of 1866 and the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments—important but difficult content that the state does well to confront. Finally, grade 5 includes an indicator that asks students to “summarize how the role of federal government expanded during the [New Deal] period” (5.2.P), accompanied by a list of new programs, as well as

a bullet for the Temperance Movement, with references to both the Eighteenth and Twenty-First Amendments. Students in grade 5 should also learn about different types of government via other standards. For example, standard three asks students to “compare the ideologies and policies that led to World War II” and includes references to communism, democracy, and fascism, while standard four directs students to “compare and contrast the capitalist and communist ideologies.”

Sixth grade, which focuses on world civilizations, is an opportunity to learn about the forms of government through canonical examples such as Athenian democracy and the Roman Republic (which the alignment guide somewhat cryptically references). Similarly, seventh-grade world history is an important opportunity to learn about the U.S. Constitution’s Enlightenment roots (e.g., by studying Locke and Montesquieu, both of whom make an appearance in the Guide).

Finally, eighth graders study “the history of South Carolina, within the context of United States history.” And here, again, the alignment guide deserves praise for addressing difficult topics forthrightly. For example, one particularly strong indicator requires that students “analyze the continuities and changes in South Carolina’s identity resulting from the civic participation of different individuals and groups of South Carolinians” (8.5.CC), a challenge the alignment guide addresses by referencing specific court cases and laws that highlight the role of activism in reforming education (e.g., *Abbeville v. South Carolina* [2014] and the Education Accountability Act [1984]) and advancing civil rights (e.g., *Loving v. Virginia* [1967] and *Elmore v. Rice* [1947]).

High School

In addition to a semester of U.S. Government, South Carolina requires a year-long course in “U.S. History and the Constitution” that includes an unusual amount of civics for a history course. To wit, the first standard focuses on “foundations of American republicanism and federalism,” and the associated guidance includes references to the Articles of Confederation, “constitutional compromises,” and the Marshall Court (among other items). From there, the course proceeds chronologically, focusing on the changes resulting from national expansion and the reunion following the Civil War, reforms related to industrial capitalism and urbanization, and the gradual expansion of individual rights.

Constitutional principles are identified. Every Amendment between the Thirteenth and the Nineteenth is specifically referenced, as are five Supreme Court cases (including *Marbury v. Madison*, *Brown v. Board of Education*, and *Roe v. Wade*) and at least thirty specific acts of Congress, from the Alien and Sedition Acts to Title IX.

Though not perfect from a U.S. History perspective, the course has much to offer from a civics perspective. However, to a greater extent than in previous grades, the list-based approach creates challenges. For example, one item in the “Foundations of Republicanism” section reads, “Constitutional Principles: Impeachment, Judicial Review, Separation of Powers, Veto.” But it’s not clear why *these* four items (some of which aren’t really principles) appear in the same list or what educators are supposed to do with them (and the same could be said of any number of other items).

After a year of piggybacking on U.S. History, the teaching of civics takes center stage in the U.S. Government course, which is organized into four overarching standards. The first of these (“foundations”) starts with “philosophical influences on core principles” and founding documents before turning to the major debates surrounding the Constitution’s formation and adoption and the application of the aforementioned principles to real world situations (though that last bit is vague).

Similarly, the second standard (“government structure”) begins with indicators on the three branches and the separation of powers, before moving on to the Bill of Rights, the structure of South Carolina’s government, and rule of law. In general, the alignment guide does a reasonable job of detailing content related to the roles of the three branches. For example, the students are to understand the “Appointment of Federal Judges, Civil vs. Criminal Cases, Judicial Activism vs. Judicial Restraint, Jurisdiction, [and] Types of Federal Courts.” However, the term “rule of law” is never explained or defined, and the potpourri of “possible content” for this indicator provides almost no sense of direction.

Standard three, which deals with “the Political Process,” focuses on how policy is influenced and shaped, with repeated references to “linkage institutions” (media, interest groups, etc.), political participation, and public opinion—as well as “the influence that lobbyists have on the process.” The coverage of electoral process is a high point,

with references to the electoral college, election-related amendments (including the often-overlooked Twenty-Fourth Amendment), campaign strategies (swing states and balancing the ticket), major election-relation legislation, sources of campaign finance, and the relevant Supreme Court cases (*Buckley v. Valeo* and *Citizens United*). However, there is no mention of redistricting or voter access policies.

The course closes with a standard on “the rights and responsibilities associated with citizenship,” which starts with the naturalization process before moving to “economic, personal, and political rights,” the analysis of “contemporary issues and governmental responses at various levels in terms of how they have provided equal protection under the law,” and the importance of “making judgements with balanced information, evidence, civility, respect, and fairness.” In general, the handling of these disparate topics is cryptic. For example, the “possible content” for the indicator on individual rights includes “bills of attainder” (which is worth about five minutes of class time) and “civil rights and civil liberties” (which could be the whole course).

Strengths & Weaknesses of the South Carolina Civics Standards

Strengths

1. The high school U.S. Government course explicitly references most essential content.
2. In addition to a semester of U.S. Government, high school students take a year-long course in “U.S. History and the Constitution.”
3. Informed participation is consistently emphasized.

Weaknesses

1. Skills-based organization results in needless confusion.
2. There is no coverage of comparative government at the high school level.

Here too there are some holes. For example, there is no reference to freedom of the press or the growing tensions between privacy and security, nor is there any discernible coverage of comparative politics (for example, students are never asked to consider the strengths and weaknesses of a parliamentary system or the “ranked-choice” voting system that Maine and Alaska have adopted). Without exposure to such topics, even students who have a reasonably good handle on the American system of government may lack perspective.

Skills and Dispositions

Skills development is a strength of the South Carolina standards. For example, beginning in the elementary grades, students are expected to use evidence and evaluate the accuracy and validity of their sources. And by grade 8, they are expected to identify “bias, context, tone, purpose, and periodization,” corroborate multiple sources, develop informed opinions, clarify their positions on policy issues, and consider opposing viewpoints.

Similarly, many standards explicitly or implicitly encourage the cultivation of civic dispositions. For example, several civics and government indicators for the early grades refer to “compassion, cooperation, empathy, honesty, and respect.” In the high school government course, the “informed participation” strand expects students to “acquire knowledge and participate in the political process as an informed citizen” by formulating “a plan to propose a new piece of legislation.”

Clarity and Organization: 2/3

The details provided by the alignment guides make South Carolina’s otherwise broad social studies standards usable. However, despite the presence of the expository narratives (which are helpful), the content lists that follow specific indicators are cryptic, and the largely skills-based organization of the indicators means that some content maps to multiple indicators (and thus appears multiple times). For example, the words “Federalism (including: Interstate Compacts, Extradition, Grants, Historical Tensions, impeachment) (*sic*)” appear in the lists of “possible content” for three consecutive “government structure” indicators but never with any explanation.

Ultimately, scope and sequence are reasonably clear, with the target subject for each grade or course explicitly identified and sufficient detail provided to clarify the coverage aims. But educators who want to cover important topics *once* will need to do their own organizing.

U.S. History: B

In Brief

South Carolina requires that U.S. History be covered in full twice and offers opportunities for substantive depth in the alignment guides’ expository narratives, but the standards are overly broad and fragmented and the narratives are patchy.

Content and Rigor: 5/7

K-8

Early grades build outwards from self to community to state to nation, while examining concepts of change over time and basic evidentiary sources. The expository narrative in the grade 1 alignment guide adds direct reference to primary and secondary sources. The grade 2 guide adds lists of holidays, historical individuals, and a smattering of major events, with a particular emphasis on cultural diversity.

After a year of World Geography in grade 3, the first of two passes through U.S. History begins in grade 4 (and concludes in grade 5), which covers U.S. and South Carolina history from colonization to Reconstruction. Each of the five eras within this period receives a single standard and six indicators (one for each of the grade’s skills categories). However, discussion in both the “enduring understanding” summaries and indicators is very broad. More substantive content appears in the alignment guide, particularly the expository narratives, but coverage is erratic (and occasionally inaccurate). The Colonial-era narrative focuses heavily on South Carolina; some key issues (such as the rise of self-government) are mentioned, but such specifics are limited to bulleted lists that lack context or explanation. The narrative for the Revolution, Articles of Confederation,

and Constitution is reasonably solid and goes far beyond the general indicators. However, after 1800, both the narrative and indicators emphasize westward expansion at the expense of other subjects. Finally, although slavery is correctly highlighted as the root cause of sectionalism, the Civil War narrative is vague on the causes of the war.

Grade 5 continues with the same structure and approach, covering from the Second Industrial Revolution to the present. However, the framing of indicators by skills categories leads to chronological problems (e.g., the 1929 stock market crash comes before World War I). Despite some better items, such as a list of New Deal programs, the outline comes across as rushed, often reducing vast issues to single sentences and glossing over much material (for example, the 1970s and 1980s are all but absent). Again, the alignment guide adds uneven detail. For example, the late-nineteenth-century labor movement is mentioned in the bulleted lists but not in the expository narratives. However, the narratives do cover the Depression, New Deal, and World War II reasonably well and acknowledge the reality of the Cold War communist threat better than the standards themselves. Similarly, the end of segregation is well covered, but its rise is curiously neglected, and there is still almost no coverage of the 1970s and 1980s.

After two years of world civilizations and geography, grade 8 offers a reasonably thorough South Carolina history course, though there could be a clearer emphasis on the history of race in the state. For example, South Carolina's leading role in secession is not mentioned, and there is a worrying reference to the state's struggle "to maintain its unique culture and economy throughout the Reconstruction Era" (standard three, "enduring understanding"). Fortunately, the relevant alignment guide deals more forthrightly with slavery, secession, and Reconstruction. Indeed, a note specifies that "Lost Cause mythology should be taught within its proper context as an effort by former Confederates to justify the protection of slavery and secession."

High School

The high school course on "United States History and the Constitution" covers roughly the same time period as the grade 4–5 course—i.e., 1607 to the present—but in half the time (unfortunately, neither course covers precontact Native American cultures). However, although South Carolina should be commended for covering U.S. History in full at

both the primary and the secondary level, the high school outline (which is shorter than the fourth- and fifth-grade outlines combined) often feels rushed and shallow. Political developments from 1607 to 1800 are hastily jumbled together. The period from 1800 to 1877 is crammed into a single standard, with little specific focus. The "Capitalism and Reform" era rushes from 1877 to 1924 (though the labor movement is at least mentioned this time), while "Modernism and Interventionism" jumps to 1893–1945, thereby smashing the two (very different) world wars together. A final "Legacy of the Cold War" section covers everything from 1945 to the present, with references to technological and economic change, ideological conflict and proxy wars, political change, foreign policy, and the Civil Rights movement—but scarcely any details. As in earlier grades, there are only six indicators per era, each defined by one of the six skills categories, which undermines chronology and limits detail. In fact, despite sharing this organizational flaw, the grade 4–5 outlines actually do a better job of covering U.S. History than the high school outline.

Fortunately, the expository narratives in the high school course's alignment guide are far more detailed than the

Strengths & Weaknesses of the South Carolina U.S. History Standards

Strengths

1. South Carolina is one of the few states to require two full U.S. History courses, one in grades 4–5 and one in high school.
2. Despite their unevenness, the expository narratives in the alignment guides often offer more substance than conventional outlines.

Weaknesses

1. The content standards and expository narratives are overly broad and problematically organized.
2. The high school U.S. History course is disappointingly thin and rushed.

main standards outline. The narratives give short shrift to the Colonial period but do provide generally solid (albeit compact) discussion of key issues in the Revolution and its aftermath, despite a few gaps (like the substance of the Hamilton-Jefferson schism). Coverage of the antebellum period through Reconstruction is patchy and chronologically jumbled (though secession is correctly attributed to “the South’s dedication to preserving the institution of slavery”). In contrast, coverage of the Gilded Age, labor movement, Populism, Progressivism, and immigration is brief but generally solid. However, the 1893–1945 summary focuses heavily on economic issues, at the expense of the two world wars (which are invoked rather than explained). A final narrative that addresses the entire post-1945 period includes few details, with thematic organization again making a jumble of chronology. As in the standards, the 1970s and 1980s get almost no coverage, but Reagan and the conservative movement are at least mentioned this time.

As in grades K–8, the specific examples listed in the high school alignment guide add important but erratic detail without context or explanation. Compared to the K–8 guides, the high school guide lists more optional content themes for each indicator, but it still makes no real effort to be comprehensive.

Skills Development

At the K–2 level, the expected skills focus conventionally on concepts of continuity and change and basic sources of historical evidence. Specifically, history-related skills are also offered for grades 4–6, grade 8, and high school history courses and are divided into six categories: “comparison,” “causation,” “periodization,” “context,” “continuities and changes,” and “evidence.” Skills coverage across the various categories is competent, and guidance on critical analysis of sources, though relatively brief, points out many key analytical skills. For example, students are expected to use primary and secondary sources and to understand point of view, bias, and purpose in primary sources by grade 4, and by grade 5 they are to identify differences between primary and secondary sources and evaluate the accuracy and validity of secondary sources—though little more is added by the high school level. However, there is unfortunately little emphasis at any level on *presenting* research and conclusions. For example, the only reference to written presentation appears under geography skills.

Clarity and Organization: 2/3

As discussed in the Civics portion of this review, South Carolina’s social studies standards are generally clear and user-friendly, as are the associated alignment guides, with scope and sequence specifically indicated for each grade or course. However, the decision to organize the specific content indicators by skills category is unfortunate, as it undermines chronology and repeatedly fragments the content within eras. Even the expository narratives in the alignment guides are sometimes organized thematically, jumping from subject to subject within a given era. And although the substantive content provided by the alignment guides is a significant improvement upon the very general standards, it would be helpful if the connection between the documents were made more explicit (for example, the main standards document makes no reference to the alignment guides, though the state web page does point to them and explain their purpose).

Recommendations

Civics

1. **Organize the U.S. Government content by topic** (e.g., federalism) rather than by abstract skill.
2. **Add a standard on comparative politics** to the U.S. Government course.

U.S. History

1. **Organize content indicators chronologically** in history-focused grades and courses.
2. **Expand the outlines and expository narratives** to achieve greater breadth and depth, especially in high school.

Both Subjects

1. **Clearly articulate what students should know** instead of listing “possible content.”

Documents Reviewed

- “South Carolina Social Studies College- and Career-Ready Standards,” 2019, <https://ed.sc.gov/index.cfm?LinkServID=9677E07B-CFFE-6A5C-AA47F98625149ABC>
- Alignment Guides (2019) for grades K, 1, 2, 4, 5, and 8, as well as for two high school courses: U.S. History and the Constitution and U.S. Government (alignment guides for grades 3, 6, and 7 documents are excluded because grades 3 and 7 focus on geography and grade 6 on world civilizations), <https://ed.sc.gov/instruction/standards-learning/social-studies/resources>

ENDNOTES

1. South Carolina’s best-in-the-nation (but now superseded) 2011 “support documents” are still archived on the state’s social studies website, below the current alignment guides. For further discussion of those exemplary materials, see Fordham’s 2011 review of the mostly identical 2008 versions: http://www.edexcellencemedia.net/publications/2011/20110216_SOSHS/SOSS_USHistory_SouthCarolina.pdf.

South Dakota

A	Exemplary	10
	Standards worthy of implementation	9
B	Good	8
	Targeted revisions recommended	7
C	Mediocre	6
	Significant revisions strongly recommended	5
D F	Inadequate	4
	Complete revision recommended before implementation	3
		2
		0-1

Civics: C-

Content & Rigor: 4/7

Clarity & Organization: 1/3

Total Score: 5/10

U.S. History: D+

Content & Rigor: 3/7

Clarity & Organization: 1/3

Total Score: 4/10

Overview

South Dakota’s civics standards are mediocre, and its U.S. History standards are inadequate. Sometimes helpful efforts to “unpack” the core standards are hamstrung by their inherent vagueness and by needlessly complex organization. At a minimum, significant revisions are strongly recommended.

Description of the Standards

South Dakota’s social studies standards provide outlines for individual grades K–8 and five subject-specific high school courses, including required courses in U.S. History and U.S. Government.¹ Content is divided into four disciplinary strands—history, civics/government, geography, and economics—that are subdivided into thematic “anchor standards,” which are in turn provided with grade-specific standards. At the elementary level, all four strands are included in each grade-level outline. However, grades 6–8 use different combinations of strands to address more subject-focused content, and the high school history strand is divided between U.S. History and World History. Supplemental “unpacked documents”² expand upon each grade-level standard in a complex chart that includes a restatement of the standard in “student-friendly language,” a brief statement of necessary prior knowledge, boxes for what students should know factually and interpretively, a list of vocabulary, “possible misconceptions students may have,”

connections to an outside document on South Dakota’s Native American peoples, “example strategies,” and “possible civic engagement activities,” among other categories.

Civics: C-

In Brief

Although the core civics standards include very little specific content, the “unpacked” standards often include the requisite details—albeit in an incredibly frustrating format. However, even with the assistance of these documents, the standards pay strikingly little attention to historic struggles for voting and civil rights (among other topics).

Content and Rigor: 4/7

K-8

Although many of South Dakota’s K-8 civics standards are vague, the supplementary documents that “unpack” them often include additional details. For example, a standard that suggests second graders “explain the basic political roles of leaders in the larger community” is vague (2.C.2.1), but the “unpacked” version does include references to the mayor, city council, and school board (which at least makes it clear what “community” the standards have in mind). Similarly, third graders are expected to “explain the meaning and importance of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution” (3.C.2.1), the “basic roles” of “leaders in the state and nation” (3.C.2.2), and “the rights and responsibilities of citizenship” (3.C.4.3). And in each case, the supplementary documents play a critical role in defining the scope of the otherwise vague standard. Finally, fourth graders are asked to compare and contrast “major themes” in the U.S. and South Dakota Constitutions and “discuss South Dakota’s government and the roles of the three branches” (4.C.2.1 and 4.C.3.2). According to the unpacked versions of these standards, that means students should understand that the U.S. and state constitutions are the highest laws in the nation and state and be able to “describe how the SD constitution may be amended (either by a majority vote

of both... houses of the legislature or by voter initiative) and compare this to the process for amending the U.S. Constitution.”

Fifth grade, which covers U.S. History to 1865, rightly includes more civics standards than previous grades. Yet many of those standards are vague. For example, students are expected to “illustrate historical and contemporary means of changing society” (5.C.5.3); “compare and contrast procedures for making decisions in a variety of settings, including classroom, school, government, and/or society” (5.C.3.2); and explain “how rules and laws change society and how people change rules and laws” (5.C.1.2). In many cases, the supplementary documents are unable to overcome the vagueness of the standards. (For example, according to the supplemental document, students who can illustrate the “means of changing society” understand that “through our history, technological, social, cultural, and economic changes have revolutionized the structure of America.”) Fortunately, the supplementary documents for standards that ask students to “show where the ideas come from that informed the Constitution” and “examine the origins and purposes of rules, laws, and key U.S. constitutional powers” include references to the Declaration of Independence, the Articles of Confederation, the Constitutional Convention, the U.S. Constitution, and the Bill of Rights, as well as the separation of powers, the branches of government, and checks and balances. However, despite the ostensible focus on U.S. History through 1865, there are no references to slavery (or anything that occurred after 1790) in the fifth-grade civics standards.

Appropriately, the civics standards for sixth grade, which focuses on ancient civilizations, include a standard on “ancient forms of government” (6.C.1.1). According to the unpacked standards, the vocabulary for this standard includes democracy, republic, empire, monarchy, oligarchy, tyranny, patriarchal system, and dynasty. However, the words Greece and Rome don’t make an appearance. And other standards focus vaguely on the impact of unspecified “ancient world history documents,” unspecified ways in which governments maintain order and meet the needs of their citizens (though citizenship itself is never defined), and unspecified ways that people can affect or influence society and government. Similarly, seventh grade (which focuses on world geography) has only one civics standard: “Identify and

describe different forms of government used throughout the world” (7.C.1.1). This is still the right idea, and the unpacked standards appropriately list representative democracy, direct democracy, communism, dictatorship, monarchy, and oligarchy as forms to be learned. But again, more is possible. For example, there is no reason that seventh graders cannot also learn the differences between presidential and parliamentary systems or between unitary, federal, and confederal systems.

Commendably, the civics standards for eighth grade, which recaps U.S. History from the Revolutionary War through Reconstruction, begin with a standard on how European ideals influenced the development of American Government. However, although the unpacked version of this standard mentions Greece and Rome, there is no reference to Magna Carta, Locke, Montesquieu, or the Enlightenment. Meanwhile, the other civics standards include chestnuts such as, “Explain how government decisions impact people, places, and history” (6.C.1.2). Fortunately, the history standards for eighth grade include the expectations that students “summarize the basic structure of government adopted through compromises at the Constitutional Convention” (8.H.4.5) and “connect the fundamental liberties and rights in the first fifteen amendments of the Constitution to current events” (8.H.4.6), and the unpacked versions of these and other standards specifically reference items such as the Great Compromise, the Three-Fifths Clause, and the three Reconstruction Amendments.

High School

Like its K–8 civics standards, South Dakota’s thirty-one high school civics standards are organized into six anchor standards, the first of which covers “the historical principles and philosophical purposes and various forms of governments.” Mystifyingly, the first high school standard in this bucket instructs students to “rationalize the purposes of government throughout world history through the use of compelling questions” (9-12.C.1.1), which injunction is followed by somewhat clearer standards on forms of government, “critical events” in British history, “the influence of religion on Western political thought,” and “the relationship between political ideologies and corresponding economic ideologies” (9-12.C.1.3-5).

The second anchor standard deals with “the historical impact of primary founding documents including but not limited to, [sic] the Declaration of Independence, the U.S. Constitution, the U.S. Bill of Rights and subsequent amendments.” Subsidiary high school standards address the distinction between constitutional and unconstitutional government, the Declaration of Independence, the Articles of Confederation, the Preamble of the U.S. Constitution, “the construction of the United States Constitution as a bundle of compromises reflecting different points of view” (9-12.C.2.5), and how the debates between Federalists and anti-Federalists led to the Bill of Rights. However, despite the anchor standard, there are no standards on “subsequent amendments,” and both the poorly worded standard on the Articles of Confederation and the supplemental document miss the key point, which is that their weaknesses paved the way for the strong federal government envisioned by the Constitution.

The third anchor standard, which focuses on “how the Constitution organizes the government of the United States,” is perhaps the least satisfying. For example, the first standard deals with “the separation of powers and checks and balances” (9-12.C.3.1), yet there are no separate standards on the powers of Congress, the Presidency, or the courts, as outlined in Articles 1–3 of the Constitution. And the “unpacked” documents make things worse by claiming that “a contemporary misconception is that the executive branch is more powerful than the other two branches” (in fact, the historic growth of the executive branch is perhaps the most important and widely recognized trend in U.S. Government, which is one of many reasons that it deserves its own standard). Similarly, a standard that asks students to consider the pros and cons of the Electoral College is well conceived, but students should also know how senators, representatives, or members of the Supreme Court are elected or appointed, as well as their terms of office. And a standard on judicial review is fine, but students should also know how the judicial system is structured (e.g., that in addition to the Supreme Court, there are also appellate courts). Finally, a poorly worded standard on “the roles of the levels of authority in the national, state, local, and tribal governments regarding American federalism” (9-12.C.3.5) mostly points in the right direction, but the “unpacked” version errs by claiming that “the United States

Constitution divides power among the central government, state government, and regional governments.” In fact, the U.S. Constitution doesn’t mention regional or local governments, which is why their powers vary by state.

The fourth anchor standard, which examines “the fundamental principles of America’s democratic republic and the United States Constitution and the inherent conflicts that may arise,” begins with a standard on civic virtue, which is followed by two standards that ask students to summarize “the general principles of American Democracy” (e.g., “the necessity of compromise”) and “the constitutional principles of popular sovereignty, limited government, separation of powers, checks and balances, judicial review, and federalism” (9-12.C.4.2-3). Notable items that are missing from both lists (and the rest of the standards) include the rule of law, due process, and equal protection. Finally, an unusually well-

crafted standard asks students to differentiate between positive and negative rights and give examples of how the two may come into conflict, yet the “unpacked” version claims that “the United States Constitution protects both positive and negative rights”—which it mostly doesn’t—and no specific rights or Constitutional amendments are mentioned.

The fifth anchor standard, which deals with “the ways in which a citizen can use their basic rights to influence the decisions of the republic,” features a seemingly random collection of topics—civic virtue, the naturalization process, political parties and special interest groups (misleadingly characterized as “ideological” in the “unpacked” standards), civil disobedience, volunteerism, “consistencies and inconsistencies throughout a variety of media sources” (9-12.C.5.6), and “how technology has changed the way people participate beyond their traditional sphere of influence” (9-12.C.5.9). Sensibly, the unpacked standards treat the quoted standards as a call for media literacy and an opportunity to discuss the impact of social media. However, none of the standards in question directly address the nuts and bolts of the electoral process—there are no references to redistricting, closed primaries, campaign finance laws, or voter access policies. Finally, a pair of standards that touch on “the foreign policy process” and “the various international organizations in which the United States is involved” are unobjectionable (9-12.C.6.1-2). However, there is nothing that could be characterized as “comparative politics,” without which students are unlikely to have much perspective on the American system.

Notably, equal-protection-related content that often appears in other states’ high school U.S. History standards, such as the Nineteenth Amendment, *Brown v. Board of Education*, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 is missing from the South Dakota high school standards, making the omission of equal protection in the high school civics standards all the more glaring.

Skills and Dispositions

As noted, many of the core civics standards are too vague to provide much guidance. However, as is the case for content, the unpacked standards often provide some sense of scope or direction when it comes to skills—either in the

Strengths & Weaknesses of the South Dakota Civics Standards

Strengths

1. The “unpacked” standards often include important details that are missing from the core standards, as well as helpful explanations.
2. Every unpacked standard includes “possible civic engagement activities” that send the right messages to students and should be helpful to practicing educators.

Weaknesses

1. Even in the “unpacked” standards, some essential content is missing, underplayed, or buried.
2. Many individual standards are vague or confusing, and “unpacking” them doesn’t always help.
3. The organization and presentation of the unpacked standards is needlessly complex.

box on “C3 Framework Relevant Skills and Application” or in the box labeled “Students Will Be Able To Do.” Items that appear in the latter space include suggestions that students develop an argument for or against the electoral college and voter registration requirements, the expectation that they will identify bias and misleading information in media sources, and an explicit call to “organize actions for social justice.” As those examples suggest, the quality of the skills guidance varies, but ultimately the good outweighs the bad.

In a similar vein, South Dakota includes “possible civic engagement activities” in the “unpacked” version of every social studies standard—including those that deal with history, geography, and economics. Examples of suggested activities range from writing an editorial about the need for compromise to brainstorming ways of using civil disobedience to implement change, so the standards cannot be accused of foolish consistency. Still, the message that civic engagement is *always* a priority is the right one, and many of the suggestions that appear in this space are thoughtful and creative.

Clarity and Organization: 1/3

Although the core South Dakota social studies standards are presented in a straightforward manner, the wording of many individual standards is vague or unclear. In contrast, the supplemental “unpacked” documents sometimes include important details, yet their organization and presentation borders on chaos for two reasons: First, the unpacked version of each standard is a separate PDF document, making it extremely difficult to see the big picture, even for a particular grade level or course. Second, each supplemental document is divided into so many boxes that extracting the content that does exist becomes a needlessly frustrating mining operation. Eliminating half of the boxes and presenting all the supplemental materials for a given grade or course in one document would be sensible first steps toward organizational sanity.

U.S. History: D+

In Brief

South Dakota’s “unpacked documents” erratically supplement the extremely thin content coverage in its grade-level standards. But content remains chronologically jumbled and frequently inadequate, and the overarching U.S. History sequence is both flawed and unclear.

Content and Rigor: 3/7

K-8

South Dakota’s history strand offers five fixed anchor standards. However, only two of the five are used in grades K–2, focused on analyzing “how major events are chronologically connected” and impact one another and analyzing “the impact of people, events, ideas, and symbols upon history using multiple sources.” To address those overarching topics, the K–2 grade-level standards and the “unpacked” additions present simple concepts of chronology, commemorated people and events, and holidays. The only historical specifics are scattered “connections” to an outside document on local Native American history. Grade 3 adds a third anchor standard directing students to “develop historical research skills,” and the grade-level standards and “unpacked” additions refer broadly to early settlers in America, their hardships, efforts, and “choices.” However, as in early grades, there are almost no specifics, and the scope is otherwise unspecified.

Grade 4 adds in the last two anchor standards, which ask students to “analyze and evaluate historical events from multiple perspectives” and “identify and evaluate the causes and effects of past, current, and potential events, issues, and problems.” Here, the grade-level standards and “unpacked” additions invoke very general themes in South Dakota history (e.g., “Analyze the impact of significant historical events on the development of cultures in South Dakota” (4.H.1.1.), supplemented with the requirement that students “describe the historical events that lead [sic] to the development of South Dakota”). However, the scattered references to Native Americans and to settlers’ pursuit of opportunity remain extremely broad.

Based on the limited information in the standards documents, the main U.S. History sequence appears to begin in grade 5 (several of the history strand’s fifteen grade-level standards are entirely nonspecific, but others refer to events from the Colonial era to 1865). Students are expected to “identify and describe the roles of influential people during the American Revolution” (5.H.2.2) and “compare and contrast social, economic, and philosophical differences between the north and the south prior to the Civil War” (5.H.4.5). But that is as detailed as the standards themselves ever get. The “unpacked” documents add sporadic references to explorers, rival colonial empires, and scattered events and concepts including the French and Indian War, Stamp Act, First Continental Congress, Loyalists, Louisiana Purchase, Manifest Destiny, and Industrial Revolution. The sectional schism is problematically reduced to “social and financial differences and similarities” between North and South, with slavery mentioned only in passing. Even with these fragments of content scattered across the thematic anchor standards, there is no hint of chronological structure.

After grades 6 and 7 turn to world history and cultures, grade 8 resumes U.S. History, from the Revolution to Reconstruction. The twenty-nine grade-level standards, still chronologically jumbled across the five thematic anchor standards, are less nebulous than those in earlier grades, often mentioning some specific history such as the Articles of Confederation, Antebellum reform movements, Federalists/ Anti-Federalists, and Manifest Destiny. The “unpacked” supplements add a fair number of specifics, including references to colonial self-government (where the Iroquois government is incorrectly listed as a primary influence), some events of the Revolutionary era, Shays’ Rebellion, major debates at the Constitutional Convention, the first party divide, some specific reform movements, Jacksonian democracy, new technologies and industrialization, policies toward Native Americans, a smattering of Civil War terms (including “succession” in place of secession) and events, some institutions and policies of Reconstruction, and Jim Crow laws. Yet these references are chronologically jumbled and visually scattered across the “unpacked” documents’ many subcategories.

Again, slavery is problematically downplayed as the root cause of the Civil War, this time in a list of “possible misconceptions” that seeks to dispel the notion “that every state that succeeded [sic] was motivated by the same issue.”

High School

The high school U.S. History outline includes only sixteen grade-level standards—substantially fewer than grade 8. And although the standards note a requirement of one credit of U.S. History in high school, it is far from clear what that means in practice. Based on feedback from a “special workgroup” of U.S. History teachers, South Dakota created three “course options”—Early U.S. History, Modern U.S. History, and Comprehensive U.S. History—“to allow for flexibility within school districts.” Seven of the grade-level standards are parenthetically assigned to Early U.S. History, while nine are assigned to Modern U.S. History (all, of course, are assigned to the “comprehensive” option). Judging from the references to specific events and eras, the Early U.S. History course runs from the Revolution to the Civil War and the Modern U.S. History course runs from Reconstruction

Strengths & Weaknesses of the South Dakota U.S. History Standards

Strengths

1. Content items sometimes point to important historical issues, and there is some emphasis on relevant skills.
2. The supplemental “unpacked” documents sometimes contain enough raw material for an adequate outline, particularly in grade 8.

Weaknesses

1. The U.S. History content is thin, extremely general, full of holes, and chronologically jumbled.
2. The U.S. History sequence is both unclear and seriously flawed, relegating the Colonial era to grade 5 only and *appearing* to make all material after 1877 optional.
3. The organization of the “unpacked” standards is needlessly complex.

onwards (though nothing later than the Cold War is actually mentioned).³

The high school standards do include some specifics, with references to the Revolution, the Civil War, Reconstruction, slavery, Antebellum reform movements, the Second Great Awakening, the Progressive era, the Depression, the World Wars, and the Cold War. Still, many standards are exceedingly broad. For example, students are expected to “analyze how individuals and groups reacted to social, political, and economic problems in the U.S. from Reconstruction through the Progressive Era” (9-12.H.1.4), as well as “critique the development of American industrial society including its impacts on migration, systems of slavery, and the national economy” (9-12.H.3.3). As in K–8 grades, the grade-level standards are scattered between the thematic anchor standards, meaning there is no chronological outline or context.

Some additional specifics can be found in the “unpacked” supplements, but they are again scattered across numerous subcategories, with minimal regard for chronology. The Gilded Age and Progressive era are named, and labor unions and industrialists are mentioned alongside a few important individuals. Bits of the Revolutionary and early national periods appear after discussion of the late nineteenth century—followed immediately by a broad reference to modern political divisions, before moving back to generic invocations of slavery, migration, and industrialization. The sectional crisis and Civil War are again attributed to “multiple factors,” without reference to slavery. Cold War immediately follows Civil War, correctly mentioning fears of communist expansion but not McCarthyism or any specific events of the era. The outline jumps back to the Constitution, mentioning a few important influences on American thought, and then it moves on to broad discussion of the Second Great Awakening, WWI, the Depression, and WWII. The outline then moves back to the Revolution and on to Reconstruction, post-WWII economic change, and a strikingly cursory reference to the Civil Rights movement—all with little detail.

In short, the high school “unpacked” supplements offer significantly less detail than those provided for grade 8, while still duplicating the chronological confusion of earlier grades. There is nothing approaching a coherent outline.

Skills Development

Several of the history anchor standards nominally address skills, asking students to “use multiple sources,” analyze events “from multiple perspectives,” and “develop research skills.” Standards for early grades ask them to use records and artifacts. Primary and secondary sources are introduced in grade 3. By grade 4, students are to infer the intended audience and purpose of a historical source. By grade 6, they are to examine the credibility and intent of primary and secondary sources. In high school, students are to “identify historical evidence that draws information directly and substantively from multiple sources to detect inconsistencies in evidence in order to revise or strengthen claims” (9-12.H.5.3)—but there is little direct emphasis, even in high school, on producing written research papers. The “unpacked” supplements further expand upon these skills aims and add relevant items from the C3 Framework.

Clarity and Organization: 1/3

As described in the Civics section, the physical layout and usability of the South Dakota social studies standards are generally adequate. But the supplemental “unpacked” documents border on chaos. The unpacked version of each standard is a separate PDF document, making it extremely difficult to view the state’s materials as a whole. And each supplemental document is divided into so many subcategory boxes that extracting the usually limited content becomes a needlessly frustrating mining operation.

Because of the general dearth of explanation, the U.S. History sequence must be teased from the sparse and thinly detailed grade-level standards and the sporadic specifics in the “unpacked” supplements. And even after all the available information has been compiled, the scope of some individual grades and courses remains unclear. Are the modern and comprehensive high school U.S. History courses intended to cover content up to the present, even though nothing is mentioned later than the Cold War? Do districts actually have the option, as implied by the standards, of stopping high school U.S. History in 1877 (in which case, students would graduate having never covered any twentieth-century content)?

Recommendations

Civics

1. **Address the gaps in the high school course** (e.g., by adding discrete and nuanced standards on the structure and powers of *each* branch of government, the nuts and bolts of electoral process, and the case law associated with the expressive rights in the First Amendment, due process, and equal protection, among other topics).
2. **Ensure that the struggle for equal protection is covered in appropriate depth** (e.g., by adding specific references to the Nineteenth and Twenty-Fourth Amendments, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Voting Rights Act of 1965, and landmark Supreme Court cases such as *Brown v. Board of Education* and *Obergefell v. Hodges*).

U.S. History

1. **Improve substantive and chronological historical content outlining** to promote shared exposure to essential content.
2. **Clarify and improve the U.S. History sequence** by providing a full introductory survey before high school and a second, more advanced survey in high school.

Both Subjects

1. **Provide clearer and more specific guidance in the core standards** so there is less that needs to be “unpacked.”
2. **House all the “unpacked” content for a given grade or course in a single document** instead of having a separate link for each standard.
3. **Reduce the number of “boxes” in the unpacked version of the standards** (e.g., by eliminating boxes like “anchor standard” and “student-friendly language” and merging other boxes that tend to include similar information).

Documents Reviewed

- “South Dakota Social Studies Content Standards,” 2015, <https://doe.sd.gov/ContentStandards/documents/SDSocialS.pdf>
- “South Dakota Social Studies Unpacked Documents,” 2020, <https://doe.sd.gov/contentstandards/socialstudies-UP.aspx>

ENDNOTES

1. <https://sdlegislature.gov/Rules/Administrative/29001>
2. Each unpacked standard is offered as a separate PDF, individually linked from web pages for individual grades and the high school grade band.
3. Presumably, this means that districts may opt to cover only a portion of U.S. History in high school. The Colonial period is not included in any of the three options: it is covered only in grade 5. And because grade 8 covers only the time period through Reconstruction, it seems that students who take only the Early U.S. History option would never cover U.S. History after 1877.

Tennessee

A	Exemplary	10
	Standards worthy of implementation	9
B	Good	8
	Targeted revisions recommended	7
C	Mediocre	6
	Significant revisions strongly recommended	5
D	Inadequate	4
	Complete revision recommended before implementation	3
2		
0-1		

Civics: A-

Content & Rigor: 6/7

Clarity & Organization: 3/3

Total Score: 9/10

U.S. History: A-

Content & Rigor: 6/7

Clarity & Organization: 3/3

Total Score: 9/10

Overview

Tennessee's civics and U.S. History standards are exemplary. Rigorous content and intuitive organization are the norm, and the state is one of a handful to offer two full passes through U.S. History in addition to a standalone civics course. Although improvements are certainly possible, these standards are worthy of implementation.

Description of the Standards

After an introduction explains the structure, approach, and sequence of the standards, Tennessee offers content outlines for each K-8 grade and for high school courses including "U.S. History and Geography" and "U.S. Government and Civics" (1/2 credit), plus electives including Tennessee and African American history. Each grade/course opens with a descriptive title and introduction, followed by a series of thematic or chronological topics, each of which includes a brief overview, followed by more specific content standards.¹ In addition to content standards, Tennessee also offers Social Studies Practices (skills) for grade bands K-2, 3-5, 6-8, and 9-12, which precede the content outlines for the relevant grades and/or courses.

Civics: A-

In Brief

Tennessee’s civics standards are thorough and rigorous, starting strong in early grades and building depth in the middle and high school grades with very few omitted concepts.

Content and Rigor: 6/7

K-8

Tennessee’s civics standards for early grades are refreshingly aggressive. Kindergarteners are expected to “give examples of the following concepts: authority, fairness, responsibility, and rules” (K.11), describe the roles of local authority figures (e.g., police officers), and identify the President. First graders are to explain the roles of the President, Governor, and mayor; distinguish between rules and laws; understand that voting is a way of making decisions; and define citizenship. Finally, second graders learn about their federal and state Constitutions, the three branches of government, and the different paths to citizenship (i.e., by birth or naturalization). A few standards could and should be more specific. For example, Kindergarteners are expected to “explain the purpose of rules and laws” (K.16), but the law serves many purposes. Similarly, second graders are to “identify the rights and responsibilities of citizens of the U.S.” (2.25), but there are at least thirty rights in the Bill of Rights. Still, the overall impression is of a state that believes in its students and has no interest in wasting their time.

That impression is confirmed in third grade, the first half of which is devoted to “geography and economics” and the second half of which is devoted to U.S. History. Appropriately, the latter includes a reference to colonial “representative assemblies and town meetings” (3.28). A great deal more civics content appears in fourth grade, which covers everything from the War for Independence through Reconstruction and includes references to the Declaration of Independence, the weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation, and the major compromises of the Constitutional Convention, as well as the Federalists and Anti-Federalists, the *Dred Scott* decision, and the Reconstruction

amendments (though, as noted in the U.S. History portion of this review, the standards would do well to mention the expansion of white, male suffrage under Jackson). In addition to these historical developments, one standard directly examines the “principles embedded in the Constitution,” including the purposes of Government (as articulated in the Preamble), the separation of powers, checks and balances, and the individual rights in the First Amendment. The first half of fifth grade then completes the first U.S. History cycle, with specific references to the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Amendments and child labor laws, as well as *Brown v. Board of Education* and the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts. Notably, there is little coverage of the post-Civil War assault on African Americans’ rights. However, this topic is addressed in commendable detail in the second half of fifth grade, which is devoted to Tennessee history. Here, one finds specific references to black codes and Jim Crow laws, the impact of the Tennessee’s 1870 constitution on poll taxes and segregation, and “how the end of Reconstruction impacted Tennessee’s African American elected officials” (5.46). A final standard that addresses the structure of Tennessee’s government again focuses on the three branches.

Grades 6 and 7, which focus on world history from ancient civilization “to the exploration of Americas,” offer another opportunity for civic learning. And here, again, Tennessee’s standards are on target. Sixth graders learn about direct democracy and oligarchy from classical Greece and are also expected to describe the government of the Roman Republic. Similarly, seventh graders analyze the impact of Magna Carta, including “limiting the power of the monarch, the rule of law, and the right to trial by jury” (7.33), although they must wait until high school for the Enlightenment.

Finally, eighth grade begins the second, more detailed pass through U.S. History, from “Colonization of America to Reconstruction.” Like the first pass, this one includes much that might be characterized as “civics,” including the Alien and Sedition Acts and the Indian Removal Act. Commendably, the *Dred Scott* decision is now joined by *Marbury v. Madison*, *Gibbons v. Ogden*, *McCullough v. Maryland*, and *Worcester v. Georgia*. Periodic references to the Tennessee Constitution are also interesting and well chosen. Another standard on the principles embodied in the Constitution contains the first explicit reference to federalism but could and should go further by mentioning limited government and due process.

High School

Like earlier courses, the required course on “United States History and Geography” (which covers the period from 1877 to the present) also features plenty of civics, including references to several Supreme Court cases not mentioned in the elementary course (e.g., *Plessy v. Ferguson*, *Schenk v. United States*, and *Korematsu v. United States*) and nearly twenty specific acts of Congress. A standard on the Progressive movement notes the “adoption of the initiative, referendum, and recall,” as well as the primary system and the Sixteenth, Seventeenth, and Eighteenth Amendments (US.15). Others rightly reference to the Nineteenth and Twenty-Fourth Amendments (see the U.S. History portion of this review for a full discussion of the U.S. History course).

Like the rest of the civics standards, the required course on “United States Government and Civics” has plenty of rigorous content, as well as a few holes. To wit, the course begins with a unit on “Foundations of Constitutional Government” that recaps the influences of Greece, Rome, *Magna Carta*, and Enlightenment philosophers, plus the Declaration of Independence, Articles of Confederation, and Constitutional Convention. However, one ambitious but pedagogically demanding standard on “limited government within the Constitution” includes everything except the most important point: that the Constitution creates a government of enumerated powers, as explicitly noted in the Tenth Amendment (GC.06).

To its credit, Tennessee follows the unit on “foundations” with three discrete units for each of the three branches of government, each with multiple standards that are strongest when they are specific. For example, in the unit on the legislative branch, one solid standard lists most of the most important powers of Congress, although it should probably mention taxation (GC.15). In contrast, a standard on “how a bill becomes a law” leaves the reader wondering which features of current legislative process—committees, Presidential vetoes, or the filibuster—are meant to be included (GC.13). Similar observations can also be made about the units on the executive and judicial branches. To wit, the former is at times even more specific (with references to the often-overlooked Twenty-Second and Twenty-Fifth Amendments) but omits any discussion of independent agencies (e.g., the Federal Reserve and the EPA) or the inexorable growth of the executive branch over the past century. Similarly, the unit on the judicial branch does

a good job of addressing the role of the Supreme Court but make no mention of lower courts or the appeals process.

The next unit (on “civil liberties”) is the zenith of the Tennessee civics sequence, referencing no fewer than fifteen Supreme Court cases—all at least theoretically required rather than options from which educators may select. If the Civics course is really meant to fit into one semester, this is pushing it. But it is better to aim too high than too low. In contrast, a unit on state and local government is overly brief, with no reference to revenue or the current

Strengths & Weaknesses of the Tennessee Civics Standards

Strengths

1. A great deal of worthy content is specifically referenced in the standards.
2. The elementary sequence is unusually thoughtful, rigorous, and well sequenced.
3. Two full passes through U.S. History provide numerous opportunities for civic learning.
4. The high school civics standards provide solid coverage of the three branches of government and exceptional coverage of civil liberties.
5. The standards are generally well organized and clearly written.

Weaknesses

1. The high school course provides relatively little coverage of federalism, elections, and comparative government.
2. The generic “practices” don’t address some skills that are essential to effective citizenship, including problem analysis and the capacity for civic discourse.

Tennessee constitution (though past iterations do feature in other courses). Because it hardly appears elsewhere, this unit should also include at least one standard devoted exclusively to federalism, ideally with specific references to the Supremacy clause and the Tenth Amendment.

Finally, a unit on “citizen participation” is something of a hodgepodge, covering the duties of citizenship, electoral process, the role of the media in forming public opinion, and the naturalization process. Because of the number of topics, electoral process is given short shrift (for example, there is no mention of voter access policies or campaign finance), nor is there anything that could be considered comparative government in the high school standards. For example, students are never asked to compare parliamentary and presidential systems or consider the merits of alternatives to “first-past-the-post” elections.

In addition to the courses on U.S. government and history, high school students in Tennessee may encounter civics content in several other courses. For example, the elective courses on African American and Tennessee history take a closer look at the Civil Rights movement in the state (among other topics), while the required high school World History course begins with an examination of early efforts to “establish limits on government,” such as *Magna Carta* and the English Bill of Rights, before proceeding (for the first time) to the Enlightenment, including Montesquieu, Hobbes, and Locke.

Skills and Dispositions

Generic “social studies practices” for the various grade bands—including many that are relevant to informed citizenship—appear before each of the relevant grade or course outlines. Practices that are particularly relevant to informed citizenship include distinguishing fact from opinion, recognizing an author’s purpose and point of view, and synthesizing data from multiple sources. However, though such hallmarks of critical thinking are difficult to object to, their generality leaves something to be desired from a civics perspective. Nowhere in the “practices” that precede the high school Civics course, for example, is there any call for students to research and/or analyze a local, state, or national problem and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the proposed solutions, nor is there any reference to civil discourse. To be fair, a subsequent content standard does address the responsibilities associated with

citizenship. But in general, the “practices” don’t cultivate the skills and dispositions that are essential for fulfilling those responsibilities, and whatever civic dispositions or skills the state seeks to encourage through the K–8 content standards are implicit rather than explicit.

Clarity and Organization: 3/3

Tennessee’s social studies standards document is clearly organized and straightforwardly presented. The arrangement of content into topics and subsidiary content standards is intuitive and easy to follow, and there are no unnecessary organizational layers. In addition to these broader organization strengths, the individual standards are generally clear and mercifully free of verbiage and jargon—though, at times, a bit more explanation would be helpful.

U.S. History: A-

In Brief

Tennessee’s outlines two multiyear U.S. History courses, one in primary grades and the second in grade 8 and high school. Content outlining within these courses is usually solid and frequently outstanding, especially at the high school level.

Content and Rigor: 6/7

K-8

Grades K–2 move outward from family, school, and community to broader looks at state and nation. Geography and government are emphasized, along with concepts of chronology, national symbols and holidays, diversity and traditions, and a smattering of significant individuals.

Tennessee offers two U.S. History surveys, the first of which runs from the second half of grade 3 through the first half of grade 5. After the first half of grade 3 focuses on geography and economics, part 2 introduces “Early American and Tennessee History,” covering indigenous peoples and the early Colonial period. Content items are broad, generally pointing to issues without explaining them. But many key

issues are noted, including American Indian regional cultures and conflicts, European exploration and contact, early English colonies and their regional patterns, and the rise of both slavery and self-government in the colonies.

Grade 4 covers the period from Revolution to Reconstruction. Specificity remains uneven but improves markedly over grade 3. Much is still noted rather than explained, but many key issues are identified and some are expanded upon, including specific weaknesses in the Articles of Confederation and Washington’s presidential precedents. Thematic organization causes some chronological jumbling after 1800, and detail is patchy. For example, unusually specific attention is given to Lewis and Clark and the War of 1812, yet discussion of Jackson’s presidency oddly omits Jacksonian suffrage. Regional economic development, the expansion of slavery, and westward expansion are covered solidly, but the reform movements are missing save for abolitionism. The centrality of slavery to the sectional dispute is correctly invoked, but details are reduced to a bare list of events. The Civil War is well covered, but Reconstruction is rushed, noting the Amendments, conflicting Reconstruction plans, and Compromise of 1877 without explaining them.

Grade 5 part one completes the first survey, covering the period from the Gilded Age to the 1960s. Post-Civil War industrialization, the labor movement, western expansion, immigration, and the labor movement are quickly but competently outlined, as are imperialism and Progressivism, the U.S. role in WWI, the 1920s, Depression, and New Deal. Coverage of WWII is broad but includes issues such as propaganda and rationing. Postwar consumerism, the Cold War, the Civil Rights movement, and the JFK presidency (an odd topic for such specific focus) are also covered, with core essentials listed. The second half of grade 5 is devoted to a fairly thorough survey of Tennessee history. However, though Native American displacement, Jim Crow, and civil rights are solidly covered (including coverage of Reconstruction that expands on grade 4’s coverage), slavery is somehow unmentioned until secession. In short, the first survey would benefit from more explanation, but it does manage to touch on many essentials and is largely age appropriate.

After grades 6 and 7 turn to world history, grade 8 begins the second and more advanced U.S. History survey, covering the period from Jamestown to Reconstruction. Compared to

the first survey, detail increases significantly, now including specific colonial foundations, mercantilism, the rise of slavery, and the Great Awakening (though self-government, noted in grade 3, only appears via a passing reference to Massachusetts town meetings). Similarly, coverage of the Revolutionary era is more detailed (though the reasons for American objections to British policies still go unexplained), and coverage of the early Republic includes admirably specific references to the Adams and Jefferson presidencies, Marshall Court, War of 1812, and foreign treaties. Subsequent topics, from the rise of cotton and the reentrenchment of slavery, slave resistance/rebellion, the first industrial revolution, immigration, economic expansion, the Second Great Awakening, and contemporary reform movements are all outlined solidly. The presidency of Tennessee’s Andrew Jackson is covered in specific detail (including Jacksonian suffrage, omitted in grade 4), as is the emerging sectional

Strengths & Weaknesses of the Tennessee U.S. History Standards

Strengths

1. Tennessee’s U.S. History content outlines are generally high quality and sometimes exceptional, especially at the high school level.
2. Two full U.S. History surveys are offered, one in primary grades the other in grade 8 and high school.
3. The standards pay strong attention to history-related skills, including understanding the past in its own context.

Weaknesses

1. The content outlines have some avoidable gaps, thin spots, and departures from chronological organization.
2. Skills coverage, though strong, doesn’t address written presentation.

schism and 1860 election. However, Northern free-soil antislavery is not explained and the *reason* for sectional conflict over expansion (slavery in the territories) could be more explicit. Coverage of Reconstruction is better, though, as elsewhere, more is listed than explained.

High School

The high school U.S. History course completes the second survey, covering the period from 1877 to the present. The outline lists key features of the Gilded Age economy, westward expansion and its consequences, machine politics, immigration, the rise of Jim Crow, Social Darwinism, Populism, the labor movement and strikes, Progressivism and its policies, the women’s suffrage movement, and more—often with considerable supporting detail. Explanation could sometimes be stronger, but a lot of specifics are included. American imperialism and WWI are covered solidly, including suppression of domestic dissent, leading into remarkably detailed coverage of the 1920s’ cultural and economic landscape, including immigration restriction and the resurgence of the Klan. Roots of the Depression are also listed in depth, and even Hoover’s attempted response is detailed before coverage of the New Deal and its ideological controversies.

Coverage of WWII and the home front is sound (though isolationism isn’t well addressed), as is coverage of the emergence of the Cold War (though the genuine menace of Soviet expansionism could be better explained), along with McCarthyism, the Korean War, and rising nuclear tensions in the 1950s. Thematic organization somewhat interferes with chronology, with Vietnam, *détente*, and the end of the Cold War covered before the outline loops back to social and political issues of the 1950s and 1960s, including suburbanization, the baby boom, commercialization, mass media, and youth culture. A separate topic addresses the Civil Rights movement from *Brown v. Board of Education* through various protests, Civil Rights legislation of the 1960s, and expansion of rights movements to American Indians, Latinos, and women (though not LGBT). LBJ’s policies and the counterculture (problematically separated from Vietnam) lead into Nixon and Watergate, environmental crises of the 1970s, and an exceptionally rare look at the Carter presidency. Reagan is covered in a bit of a rush, with his New Right context omitted (and the end of the Cold War addressed in an earlier topic). Final items on the Bush,

Clinton, Bush, and Obama presidencies touch on Clinton-era issues, global terrorism, women and minorities, and new communications technology.

An elective course on African American history offers a generally solid outline, with detail mainly focused on the twentieth century. Similarly, a Tennessee history elective, also intended to help teachers elaborate on Tennessee in U.S. History courses, offers substantial and often impressive detail.

Skills Development

Tennessee emphasizes history-related skills development, with “practices” for the various grade bands placed before each grade or course and presented in their entirety in the introduction. Basic types of primary and secondary sources are already introduced in the K–2 grade band, along with sophisticated critical skills, including distinguishing facts from opinion, recognizing an author’s purpose and point of view, contrasting multiple sources/accounts, framing inquiry questions, and communicating conclusions. In more advanced grades, students are to build on these already impressive aims by considering more diverse types of sources, assessing sources’ reliability, distinguishing evidence from assertion, and synthesizing data from multiple sources. Unfortunately, presentation of conclusions does not specifically discuss written presentation at any level. A commendable section on “historical awareness”—mainly developed from grades 3–5 on—urges students to recognize how past events would have been seen by people at the time, with “historical context and empathy rather than present-mindedness.”

Clarity and Organization: 3/3

As noted in the Civics portion of this review, Tennessee’s social studies standards document is clearly organized and straightforwardly presented with little jargon. The introduction explains the approach, defines the grade-by-grade sequence, and presents the skills practices for all grade bands. Arrangement of content into topics and subsidiary content standards is intuitive, visually clean, and easy to follow, without unnecessary organizational layers.

U.S. History sequence is entirely clear: content aims for each grade or course are not only identified and summarized at

the start of each grade/course outline but are also listed and explained in the introduction. Scope is likewise clear from the descriptions and the detailed outlines. The sequence itself, incorporating two U.S. History surveys, is largely well designed, despite peripheral flaws (nothing after the 1960s is covered until high school, and precontact Native American cultures are covered only in grade 3).

Documents Reviewed

- “Tennessee Social Studies Standards,” 2017, https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/education/standards/ss/Social_Studies_Standards.pdf

Recommendations

Civics

1. **Bolster the high school course** (e.g., by adding discrete and nuanced standards on federalism, the electoral process, and comparative politics).
2. **Add skills or “practices” standards that address civics specifically** (e.g., by asking students to research and analyze an issue or problem in their community).

U.S. History

1. **Close content gaps and address flaws discussed in the review.**
2. **Improve explanatory detail in primary-grade outlines.**
3. **Address written presentation of research in their “practices” standards.**

Both Subjects

1. **Preserve the considerable strengths of the current standards in any future revisions.**

ENDNOTES

1. Tennessee also lists seven “content strands” that “are legally required to be taught” (culture; economics; geography; history; politics/government; Tennessee; Tennessee code annotated). These strands are defined in the introduction, and starting in grade 3, each standard notes the strands that are relevant to its content; however, the strands are not used to organize content at any level.

Civics and U.S. History

Texas

A	Exemplary	10
	Standards worthy of implementation	9
B	Good	8
	Targeted revisions recommended	7
C	Mediocre	6
	Significant revisions strongly recommended	5
D	Inadequate	4
	Complete revision recommended before implementation	3
F		2
		0-1

Civics: B+

Content & Rigor: 6/7

Clarity & Organization: 2/3

Total Score: 8/10

U.S. History: C+

Content & Rigor: 5/7

Clarity & Organization: 1/3

Total Score: 6/10

Overview

Although Texas's civics standards are quite good, its U.S. History standards are mediocre. Some of the most egregious items from the widely criticized 2010 standards have been revised; however, their legacy lingers in other items. In general, the standards are a peculiar mix of lucid prose, consistent but overly complex organization, and unhelpful formatting. In civics, targeted revisions are recommended, but in U.S. History, significant changes are strongly recommended.

Description of the Standards

Texas provides individual standards for grades K–8 and for high school social studies courses, including required courses on United States History Studies (one credit) and United States Government (half credit) and electives (not reviewed), including African American Studies and Mexican American Studies (one credit each). Each of the K–8 standards has two sections: an introduction and a section on knowledge and skills. Each of the knowledge and skills sections is divided into eight strands, seven of which deal with knowledge (history, geography, economics, government, citizenship, culture, and “science, technology, and society”) and one that addresses social studies skills. The high school U.S. History and U.S. Government courses follow the same strand-based organization.

Civics: B+

In Brief

Texas provides clear and rigorous guidance for most core civics topics, although the way the standards are organized and presented isn't user-friendly. Coverage of electoral process and comparative politics could be stronger.

Content and Rigor: 6/7

K-5

Texas's standards for Kindergarten establish the "foundation for citizenship" by addressing communities like family and classroom and the purpose of rules and the role of authority figures, along with a smattering of national holidays and historical figures. In first grade, students expand their knowledge of such figures, learn the names and responsibilities of public officials, examine specific rules and laws that provide security and manage conflict, and practice voting. In second grade, they identify functions of governments (e.g., establishing order), services they provide to the community (e.g., fire protection), and the role of public officials (including the mayor, governor, and President), as well as ways they are selected. In third grade, however, some of the expectations are vague. For example, students are expected to "describe the basic structure of government in the local community, state, and nation," as well as identify unspecified "local, state, and national government officials" and "the purposes of the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution, including the Bill of Rights" (Section 113.14 (b)(7-8)).

Fourth grade is devoted to the history of Texas, and in general the standards do a fine job of incorporating civically significant concepts. For example, students are expected to know about the Texas Declaration of Independence and the state's Constitution, explain the basic functions of the three branches of the state government, and identify leaders, "including the governor, local members of the Texas Legislature, the local mayor, U.S. senators, local U.S. representatives, and Texans who have been president of the United States" (Section 113.15 (b)(16)).

Fifth grade is an overview of United States history from the founding of St. Augustine in 1565 to the present, and the result is satisfactory from a civics standpoint. The reasons for colonial settlement, causes of the American Revolution, story of the Constitution, expansion of the country, Civil War and Reconstruction, world wars, Great Depression, Civil Rights movement, and War on Terror provide numerous opportunities to understand the important ideas in the Declaration of Independence, Constitution, Bill of Rights, and Reconstruction Amendments; know about the three branches of government and checks and balances; and compare the powers and responsibilities of national and state governments in the U.S. federal system (all of which are specifically required by the standards). However, two corrections should be made. First, the Mayflower Compact is cited as an example of representative government,¹ which is incorrect unless one considers the forty-three men who signed the document to be representative of the entire ship's company, including women and children.² Second, the standards refer to the rights of "citizens" under the Texas and U.S. constitutions,³ which suggests that noncitizens lack such rights (in fact, the rights in the Bill of Rights protect "persons" regardless of citizenship).

6-8

In sixth grade, the only required social studies course with an international focus, students are expected to study twelve regions of the world while identifying limited and unlimited governments; the presence or absence of human rights abuses; rule by one, the few, or many persons; and other differences in "the [organization] and...function" of governments in China, Germany, India, and Russia. Yet explaining how governments in China and Russia work is difficult for a college student, and the differences between the governments of Germany and India are interesting but subtle, so Texas's sixth graders might learn more if (a) foreign countries were compared to the United States and (b) study of the United Kingdom were specifically required, which would ideally uncover the differences between constitution as higher law and constitution as custom, presidential and parliamentary government, regular and irregular elections, federalism and unitary government, and the absence and presence of an established church. Despite the contemporary focus, the sixth-grade standards also call for students to "identify historical origins of democratic forms of government such as Ancient Greece" [Section 113.18(b)

(10)(C)]—but “Ancient Greece” wasn’t a political unit, and the standards would do well to mention the Roman Republic, which probably had more impact on the framers of the Constitution.

Seventh grade returns to the history of Texas, with the avowed intention of covering it with “more depth and breadth than in grade 4” (Section 113.19 (a)(1)). This is an accurate statement insofar as civics is concerned, as seventh graders are expected to know how the Texas Constitution reflects the principles of popular sovereignty, limited government, republicanism, separation of powers, checks and balances, individual rights, and federalism. They are also expected to compare the corresponding terms in the state and national constitutions; to describe the structure and functions of government at the municipal, county, and state levels; and to identify the major sources of revenue for state and local governments—all excellent and grade-appropriate material.

Eighth grade covers the first half of American history in greater depth, and much of the vast store of relevant civics material contained therein is managed with a sure hand. The English roots of American political principles are covered, along with influential philosophers such as Locke and Montesquieu. The grievances of the Declaration of Independence are connected to the Constitution and Bill of Rights, and the weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation are connected to the Philadelphia Convention. As in seventh grade, students analyze how the U.S. Constitution reflects the principles of limited government, republicanism, checks and balances, federalism, separation of powers, popular sovereignty, and individual rights. However, now the emergence of judicial review is also noted, as are important Supreme Court cases including *Marbury v. Madison*, *McCulloch v. Maryland*, *Gibbons v. Ogden*, and *Worcester v. Georgia*. Finally, *Dred Scott* and the Reconstruction amendments are specifically mentioned—though the standards do have some unfortunate blind spots on race (see the U.S. History portion of this review).

From a civics perspective, the two elements that are missing from the eighth-grade standards are the Roman Republic (which provided the Framers with a vision of a stable and extended republic) and some reference to the influence of other states’ constitutions during the Colonial era (which taught them the perils of legislative supremacy and an excess of democracy).

High School

Most high school civics content is found in two courses that are required for graduation.

United States History since 1877

The standards for this course are excellent from a civics perspective, specifically referencing the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, Fifteenth, Sixteenth, Seventeenth, Eighteenth, Nineteenth, Twenty-Fourth, and Twenty-Sixth Amendments, as well as notable pieces of legislation (from the Chinese Exclusion Act to the Patriot Act) and the “impact of constitutional issues on American society,” as highlighted in the five Supreme Court cases listed under that heading, including *Plessy* and *Brown* (Section 113.41(c)(20)). Other civics topics that are at least mentioned in the U.S. History standards include the growth of political machines, civil service reform, third parties, the initiative, referendum, and recall. Finally, a section devoted to Tocqueville’s concept of American exceptionalism is refreshing.

From a civics perspective, the standards for the Civil Rights movement can be improved in one respect. The movement was directed against a broad front of discrimination but focused first on legal discrimination and, in particular, legal discrimination by states. The primary tool was the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment, so the standards should mention this clause by name and require an understanding of its operation (as do the standards for the U.S. Government course).

Finally, Texas is to be commended for identifying trust in the federal government and its leaders as an important civics issue. However, it would do well to mention the Vietnam War in this section, in addition to the Teapot Dome scandal, Watergate proceedings, and the Clinton impeachment.

United States Government

The standards for this course range from very good to excellent. To wit, they call for use of the “complete text” of the Declaration of Independence, U.S. Constitution, the landmark U.S. Supreme Court cases cited, and Federalist 10 and 51—a turn of phrase that speaks volumes about the rigor and intended quality of instruction.

The standards begin with a history of the major political ideas that have been used to design and legitimize forms of

government (e.g., the divine right of kings and social contract theory); the political traditions and eras that expressed those ideas (e.g., common law and the Enlightenment); individuals whose principles most informed the American founding documents (e.g., Blackstone, Locke, and Montesquieu); and the political philosophies of the Founders themselves (e.g., Hamilton, Jefferson, and Madison). They then review the debates and compromises that lay behind the founding documents (e.g., representation and slavery) and call for the study of significant individuals who shaped or reshaped the American political framework after the Constitution was ratified (e.g., Washington, John Marshall, Lincoln, the Roosevelts, and Reagan). In general, the topics are excellent, and the examples chosen to illustrate them are equally good.

Under the odd heading of “geography,” the standards address the important issue of districting, an issue on which Texas has seen the inside of the U.S. Supreme Court more than once. Commendably, the standards note both the difficulty of line drawing and the difficulty of reviewing line drawing based on the Constitution, although references to more recent cases such as *Shaw v. Reno* (1993), *Vieth v. Jubelirer* (2004), and *Rucho v. Common Cause* (2019) would improve this section and help students understand exactly what is at stake.

The section on American political principles, which starts with the Preamble of the Constitution and moves on to Federalist Papers 10 and 51, expects the student to know the Constitutional provisions that embody the concepts of popular sovereignty, separation of powers, checks and balances, individual rights, and federalism.

The related subsections that follow are judicious. To wit, each branch of government rightly gets its own expectation in the subsection on “the structure and functions of the government created by the U.S. Constitution,” as does the so-called “fourth branch” (i.e., independent executive agencies), and the topic of federalism gets not one but four discrete expectations (Section 113.44 (7-8)). Similarly, a subsection on the Bill of Rights includes the expectation that students know every right contained therein, plus seven well-chosen cases highlighting the Supreme Court’s role in interpreting the Bill of Rights, with examples now followed by an expectation that students “recall the conditions that produced the Fourteenth Amendment and describe subsequent efforts to selectively extend some of the Bill of Rights to the states through U.S. Supreme Court rulings” (Section 113.44 (12)).

The subsection on the correspondence between American culture and government policy (and possibly the meaning of the Constitution) is excellent (Section 113.44 (c)(16)) and might be further enhanced with additional examples such as marriage, capital punishment, and controlled substances. Similarly, the subsection on science, technology, and society—consistently a very strong area in Texas’s standards—could suggest that students understand the collision between privacy and the extraordinary collection of personal information by state and nonstate actors (Section 113.44(c)(17)).

Finally, two subsections could and should be stronger: First, the subsection on “the processes for filling public offices” could be strengthened with explicit references to campaign finance and *Citizens United v. FEC*, debates over voter access policies (an exceptionally hot topic in the Lone Star State) and the terms of office for members of the federal executive and legislative branches and their state government equivalents (Section 113.44(c)(9)). Second, the subsection on comparative government (Section 113.44(c)(11)) could be improved by explicit consideration of the alternatives to federalism (i.e., unitary and confederal systems) and first-past-the-post

Strengths & Weaknesses of the Texas Civics Standards

Strengths

1. The standards include a great deal of rigorous content.
2. The language in the standards is clear and precise.
3. State government is unusually well handled.
4. Primary sources are often specifically required.

Weaknesses

1. The standards aren’t as user-friendly as they should be.
2. Coverage of the electoral process and comparative politics is weak.

elections (e.g., ranked-choice voting systems like those used by Maine and Alaska or the initiative systems used by other states).

Notably, the standards for the high school Economics course do a good job of covering the role of government in international trade, the differing schools of economic thought on the role of government in the economy, change over time in the role of American government in the economic sphere, the categories of revenue and types of expenditure of different levels of American government, and the costs and benefits of government intervention in a market economy.⁴

Skills and Dispositions

The cultivation of skills and dispositions that are essential to citizenship is a strength of the Texas standards. Throughout the document, the citizenship strand emphasizes the rights and responsibilities of citizens, political tolerance, and “the importance of effective leadership.” The expectation that twelfth graders complete a senior project on a contemporary government issue is an excellent expression of those values.

In addition to being active citizens, Texas wants its students to evaluate the validity of their many sources of information. However, given the increasing polarization of American politics, media, and society, it should also ask high school students to consider their own biases (e.g., “confirmation bias” or “affinity bias”).

Finally, from third grade on, Texas’s social studies standards call for the observance of “Celebrate Freedom Week”—the week including September 17 recognized nationally as Constitution Day. During this week, all students are to study and recite Jefferson’s statement of self-evident truths in the Declaration of Independence, and all students in social studies classes are to study the “intent, meaning, and importance” of the Declaration and the U.S. Constitution in their historical context and the “relationship” between the ideas in the Declaration and later American history.⁵ No one who supports civics education can fail to welcome this annual exercise in examining these documents. However, the high school standards for the observance are the same as the standards for third grade, which makes little sense if teachers are actually observing this holiday. Clearly, some sort of progression in sophistication and understanding is warranted.

Clarity and Organization: 2/3

The Texas civics standards are well written, with no obvious grammatical errors or professional jargon. Each grade opens with an “introduction,” the first paragraph of which is invariably an excellent summary, and the reader is advised at the beginning of the standards that the words “such as” mean that what follows is optional and the word “including” means it is mandatory—a simple but useful distinction that Texas is careful to maintain.

Unfortunately, the reliance on “strands”—even in high school courses that clearly focus on a particular subject—is decidedly unhelpful to practicing educators or others charged with designing a curriculum, often scattering or fragmenting what should be related content. Furthermore, the documents in which they are housed are visually cluttered, making it needlessly difficult to identify the beginnings of individual grades or strands and sometimes burying important material in unlikely places.

U.S. History: C+

In Brief

Texas requires two U.S. survey courses, an introductory overview in grade 5 and a two-part survey across grade 8 and high school. Yet the strand-based structure of the standards fragments the historical coverage, which is sometimes short on explanation and overly reliant on arbitrary lists of names. Furthermore, although some of the most problematic items from the state’s widely criticized 2010 standards have been revised, their legacy lingers in other items.

Content and Rigor: 5/7

K-8

From the start, Texas’s seven social studies content strands ensure that related U.S. History content is fragmented and stripped of context. Early grades’ history strands invoke holidays and patriotic symbols together with somewhat arbitrary lists of influential individuals that manage to check both traditional and diversity boxes but have little historical

rationale (an approach that persists at all grade levels and becomes harder to justify as the grade level increases). Scattered historical references also appear under other strands, but there is no coherent presentation of related content.

Grade 4, which covers Texas history from pre-Columbian Indian groups to the present, is indicative of the standards' approach to historical content outlining: the history strand offers a brief but specific outline, while additional individuals and concepts are scattered across the other strands, where they are stripped of context and typically presented with little explanation.

Grade 5 is meant to introduce U.S. History from 1565 to the present, yet the history strand's outline offers just five content items with fourteen expectations for the entirety of U.S. History. The Colonial period is reduced to a handful of settler leaders and a reference to their motivations. Representative government in the colonies is touched on under the government strand, but the establishment of slavery and the slave trade are never mentioned. "The results of the American Revolution" are mentioned but not explained or specified beyond "the establishment of the United States." The nineteenth century receives just six short expectations—though, in a welcome change from Texas's previous standards, "the central role of the expansion of slavery in causing sectionalism" is emphasized and described as the source of "states' rights" arguments.⁶ Still, this is the only reference to slavery in the entire K-5 document. Worse, the whole twentieth century is reduced to a single twenty-eight-word expectation, mentioning industrialization, urbanization, the Depression, world wars, civil rights movements, and military actions, plus a few scattered names—mostly civil rights leaders, plus FDR and Reagan. Post-2000, only the war on terror and 2008 election are mentioned. Meanwhile, the economics strand broadly mentions economic development over time and hammers the benefits of "the free enterprise system" (which is also stressed in the introduction to every grade).

After a year of contemporary world societies in sixth grade and another (still somewhat patchy) pass at Texas history in seventh grade (where slavery is mentioned repeatedly), grade 8 offers the first half of a second U.S. History survey, covering the Colonial era through Reconstruction. Now, the History strand contains nine content items with thirty-two expectations, yet detail is still erratic and some expectations

are extremely broad. The establishment of self-government in the colonies is noted but tendentiously tied to "religion and virtue." The American Revolution receives a few specifics (and another list of names), as does the Constitutional Convention. The 1790s and early nineteenth century are jumbled together with general references to the tariffs, banking, political parties, the War of 1812, early presidencies, Jacksonian democracy, and Indian removal, before the standards jump back to the Northwest Ordinance and territorial expansion, including the Mexican War.

As in fifth grade, discussion of the Civil War in 8th grade emphasizes "the central role of the expansion of slavery in causing sectionalism." Yet the preceding discussion of sectionalism (largely unaltered from 2010) still dodges the point, problematically emphasizing tariff policies before mentioning slavery and failing to link "congressional conflicts and compromises prior to the Civil War" to slavery. Moreover, coverage of the Civil War itself is thin, as is the handling of Reconstruction.

Other important points are present but, once again, confusingly split among strands. For example, both the rise of slavery and the slave trade are relegated to economics, where they are dissociated from any era or context (though students are again expected to celebrate the "benefits of the U.S. free enterprise system through 1877"). Similarly, the government strand mentions influential pre-Revolutionary documents and thinkers, along with the Reconstruction amendments, Federalists and anti-Federalists, and various Supreme Court cases including *Dred Scott*—but all without dates, explanation, or context. Another expectation in the government strand (unchanged since 2010) lists the nullification crisis and Civil War as examples of "constitutional issues arising over the issue of states' rights"—an explanation that evades slavery as the central issue in both. Moreover, the Missouri Compromise, Compromise of 1850, and Kansas-Nebraska Act appear under the citizenship strand as "events in which compromise resulted in a resolution"—again with no explicit reference to slavery. Abolitionism and other reform movements appear in the culture strand with no context (free-soil ideology and the Republican party are never mentioned at all), as do both Great Awakenings (which are lumped together). Finally, the "science, technology, and society" strand notes innovations such as steam power, the telegraph, interchangeable parts, the cotton gin, and railroads.

As is the case throughout the Texas standards, many core essentials are *mentioned*, offering capable and determined instructors and curriculum developers the elements of an effective outline—but that partial success is undermined by patchiness, lack of explanation, lingering tendentiousness, and—particularly—the fragmentation of content among the many strands.

High School

The high school U.S. “History Studies” course completes the second survey, covering the time period from 1877 to the present. Its history strand contains eleven content items with fifty-one expectations. Detail is erratic: sometimes impressive and solid, other times skimpy to nonexistent. The standards continue to favor bare lists over substantive explanation, mentioning much more than explicating. And content is still split among seven strands, fragmenting chronology, context, and coherence.

Developments from 1877 to 1898 are packed into three short expectations, glancing at Indian policy, political machines and reform, industrialization, labor unions, immigration, and women’s rights, with little explanation or context. America’s global expansion to 1920 is given more space, but detail is sporadic: Alfred Mahan and Sanford Dole are named, as is the acquisition of Guam, Hawaii, the Philippines, and Puerto Rico, but the Panama Canal is not (save for a later and completely decontextualized reference among “physical and human geographic factors” in the geography strand). Progressivism and Populism are noted but, again, with greater focus on out-of-context names than on explanation or detail. A rushed list of issues and three “significant individuals” constitute the only coverage of the 1920s; discussion of the Depression and New Deal—though sometimes specific, including detailed causes of the 1929 crash and rarely mentioned events such as forced Mexican-American repatriations—only appears later and out of context in the economics and government strands. However, WWII receives seven expectations, covering global and domestic issues reasonably well, including an accurate emphasis on the Japanese internment.

A fairly brief section covering the entire Cold War from the 1940s to Vietnam is inevitably rushed. The House Un-American Activities Committee and McCarthyism are said to have “intensified ... Cold War tensions,” correcting a notable falsehood in the 2010 standards. Meanwhile, a reasonably

strong section on the Civil Rights movement includes a new 2018 expectation noting the role of Jim Crow and the Klan in suppressing voting rights (*Plessy v Ferguson* is mentioned, though not explained, in the government strand). Coverage of the 1970s to 1990s is short (as in many states), focusing on Nixon’s foreign policy breakthroughs, Reagan’s “leadership,” U.S. involvement in the Middle East (including Iran-Contra), the conservative revival, and social issues (AIDS and the war on drugs were added in 2018 as the only specific examples). Finally, a single overburdened item covers the 1990s to the present, hastily pointing to international developments and terrorism after the Cold War; important political issues such as health care, immigration, and education; and multinational

Strengths & Weaknesses of the Texas U.S. History Standards

Strengths

1. Texas requires two full U.S. History surveys: an introductory overview in grade 5 and a two-part survey across grade 8 and high school.
2. Much essential U.S. History content appears *somewhere* in the standards.
3. There is a reasonably strong emphasis on history-related skills, including written presentation.

Weaknesses

1. Related content is splintered between seven different strands, seriously undermining coherence and chronology.
2. There are vestiges of ideological slant, particularly when it comes to slavery and its role in the sectional crisis leading to the Civil War.
3. U.S. History content outlining is uneven, often relying on bare references to events and arbitrary lists of names with little context or explanation.

corporations—plus a randomly specific expectation on the role of third parties in the 1992 and 2000 elections.

As in previous grades, much essential additional content appears within other strands. Internal migrations and environmental policies appear under geography. Specifics on westward migration, railroads, Gilded Age economic developments, immigration exclusions, and more appear under economics, as do many postwar developments such as the Baby Boom, GI Bill, and Great Society. The Depression and New Deal are split between the economics and government strands. Watergate is lumped together with Teapot Dome and the Clinton impeachment under government, along with Supreme Court rulings and war powers issues. Voting rights and protests appear under citizenship. The Harlem Renaissance crops up under culture. And so on. All that is to say, many important elements of U.S. History are contained within the “History Studies” course but scattered beyond the strand labeled “history.” One hopes that teachers can navigate this for the benefit of presenting their students with a coherent program of study.

In addition to U.S. History, Texas also outlines electives for both African American Studies and Mexican American Studies. Both are fairly brief and, again, fragment content into strands but add depth to the history curriculum.

Skills Development

Texas includes a “social studies skills” strand in each grade or course. Early grades introduce basic types of sources, concepts of chronology, and comparison of data. Grade 4 introduces primary and secondary sources (but does not define the distinction) and asks students to find the main idea and identify different points of view in sources and to present conclusions in written, oral, and visual form.

Middle school skills remain similar, but from grade 6 onwards students are expected to use citations and are repeatedly warned against plagiarism; from grade 7, students are to identify bias and points of view in historical context and evaluate the validity of a source based on corroboration from other sources and information on the author. The high school U.S. History course expands modestly on these points with additional references to historical frames of reference and context.

Clarity and Organization: 1/3

As noted in the Civics portion of this review, the words of Texas’s standards are clear, but ease of use is needlessly undermined by a visually cluttered layout that makes grades and strands difficult to identify.

Commendably, the state specifies two full courses in U.S. History: an introductory overview in grade 5 and a two-part survey across grade 8 and high school. And from grade 4 onwards, U.S. History sequence and scope are clear, with the subject-focus of each grade plainly identified in its introductory material, as well as the content outlines themselves (which have enough substance to make their coverage aims clear). Yet relentless fragmentation of what should be related content across seven different strands strips much crucial material of necessary context, dramatically undermining the chronology and coherence of the standards’ somewhat uneven content.

Recommendations

Civics

1. **Improve the coverage of electoral process and comparative politics in U.S. Government** (e.g., by adding expectations on campaign finance, policies related to voter access, alternatives to Federalism, and first-past-the-post elections).
2. **Articulate a meaningful grade-by-grade progression for “Celebrate Freedom Week”** to ensure that students and teachers of all ages are appropriately challenged.
3. **Preserve the considerable strengths of the current civics content in any future revisions.**

U.S. History

1. **Unify historical content within the history strand instead of scattering it across seven strands.**
2. **Address the residual issues with the coverage of slavery and the sectional crisis.**

3. **Improve substantive depth** (e.g., by replacing random lists of names with more coherent coverage and offering more explanation for events).

Both Subjects

1. **Develop user-friendly supplementary documents** that are professionally formatted and organize the content as a teacher might (i.e., chronologically in the history-focused courses and thematically in U.S. Government, Economics, and other courses).
2. **Reorganize the core content standards** the next time they are formally revised along the lines of the aforementioned supplementary documents.

Documents Reviewed

- “Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills for Social Studies: Subchapter A: Elementary,” 2020, <http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/rules/tac/chapter113/ch113a.pdf>
- “Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills for Social Studies: Subchapter B: Middle School,” 2020, <http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/rules/tac/chapter113/ch113b.pdf>
- Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills for Social Studies: Subchapter C: High School,” 2020, <http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/rules/tac/chapter113/ch113c.pdf>

ENDNOTES

1. Section 113.16(b)(13)(B); see also Section 113.20(b)(3)(B) in eighth grade.
2. Although the Compact committed the signers to a “civil body politic” and obedience to its laws, it didn’t specify who would make those laws. In this sense, it is akin to the social compact described by Locke, which precedes an agreement on the form of government.
3. Section 113.16(b)(19); see also Section 13.19(b)(15)(a) and 113.20(b)(19) in seventh and eighth grade.
4. See, e.g., Section 113.14 (a)(7).
5. Texas “streamlined” its 2010 standards in 2018, and in the process replaced several particularly problematic 2010 items. A 2010 expectation (that appeared in both grades 5 and 8) emphasized “states’ rights” over slavery as the cause of the Civil War. The revised 2018 expectation correctly reverses the emphasis and links states’ rights ideology to slavery. Other noteworthy revisions include the removal of a misleading emphasis on the comparatively limited WWII detention of German and Italian nationals over the internment of Japanese Americans (including many U.S. citizens) and the deletion of a false claim that the “Venona” decrypted messages vindicated the claims of Senator McCarthy and the House Un-American Activities Committee. Some items that persist from 2010 would benefit from similar rewriting.

Civics and U.S. History

Utah

A	Exemplary	10
	Standards worthy of implementation	9
B	Good	8
	Targeted revisions recommended	7
C	Mediocre	6
	Significant revisions strongly recommended	5
D	Inadequate	4
	Complete revision recommended before implementation	3
F		2
		0-1

Civics: C

Content & Rigor: 4/7

Clarity & Organization: 2/3

Total Score: 6/10

U.S. History: C

Content & Rigor: 4/7

Clarity & Organization: 2/3

Total Score: 6/10

Overview

Utah’s civics and U.S. History standards are mediocre. Though most topics receive broad coverage, there is little detail or depth, and some essential content is missing. Significant revisions are strongly recommended.

Description of the Standards

Utah offers content outlines for individual grades K–6 and for subject-specific secondary courses, including U.S. Government and Citizenship and a two-part U.S. History survey. Grades K–2 are divided into four standards—culture, citizenship, geography, and financial literacy—that are supplied with “objectives,” which are in turn provided with more specific “indicators.” In contrast, grades 3–6 have subject-specific foci and are divided into thematic/chronological standards, each of which is supplied with a “benchmark” briefly defining its aims, followed (again) by more specific objectives and indicators. Finally, grades 7–12 are organized into six subject-specific courses, including U.S. Government and Citizenship, a two-part U.S. History sequence, and Utah Studies, which are also divided into “strands.” These strands are in turn divided into standards (similar to the objectives in earlier grades), which are no longer broken down into more specific indicators.

Civics: C

In Brief

Utah’s elementary social studies standards are light on civics, and its broad and chaotically-organized secondary standards miss some key topics.

Content and Rigor: 4/7

K–6

The citizenship strand for grades K–2 emphasizes themes such as honesty, responsibility, respect, and safety, though each grade also has one objective that focuses on understanding patriotic symbols, songs, and holidays. Grade 2 starts to introduce more substantive topics such as the benefits of being a citizen and the importance of voting, but the scope of these indicators is vague. Similarly, second graders are asked to identify and explain the significance of documents such as the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, but the expected level of detail is unclear.

Grade 3 examines the responsibilities of community members: voting, jury duty, taxpaying, and obedience to laws. There’s an indicator about the role of representative government and how individual and community needs may differ and another that suggests “meaningful dialogue” about current events. These are solid, age-appropriate civics standards as far as they go, but third graders could absorb more content. And grade 4 is even more unfocused, swerving from the rights of citizens and the power of organized groups to the forms of government found in Utah in different eras. Perhaps most important, no indicator specifically addresses the various branches of the current Utah government, their powers, or their interactions—a serious omission for a grade whose theme is Utah Studies.

The pace quickens in grade 5, which focuses on the United States. There are indicators about early colonial governments and the Declaration of Independence (though they leave teachers to fill in the blanks). Indicators dealing with the Constitution—the influence of earlier documents, an analysis of the Preamble, the three branches, checks and balances, and how an idea becomes law—are appropriate to the grade

level and offer adequate specificity, and the same is true of the indicators about the amendments, which address the significance of the Bill of Rights and how the rights of certain groups have changed over time. However, the wording of several indicators leaves something to be desired. For example, the indicator on oppressed groups and another indicator that appears to be about the First Amendment both reference “the Constitution” rather than specific amendments. Finally, the indicators about nineteenth- and twentieth-century history mention some civics topics, such as the Civil Rights movement, and the objective about the role of the United States in the world has strong civics potential, if properly deployed.

In sixth grade, which focuses on “world studies,” one objective looks at how modern governments can trace some of their attributes to ancient civilizations, but no particular modern governments or ancient civilizations are specified. The Magna Carta, revolutions, human rights, and “current global issues” round out a rather random assortment of topics with civics application.

Overall, grades K–6 are light on civics and provide a weak foundation for later grades.

Subject-Specific Courses (Grades 7–12)

Although Utah law requires at least one year of U.S. History and one semester of Civics U.S. Government to graduate high school, there is no distinction between grades 7 and 8 and high school, nor is there any suggested sequence of courses at the secondary level.

Although the United States Government and Citizenship course does a reasonable job of identifying some major civics topics, it does little else. To wit, the first of five strands covers foundational principles. Yet its three standards are all laundry lists, covering at least fifteen different topics—from the rule of law to Shay’s Rebellion, the Federalist Papers, checks and balances, the president’s cabinet, and judicial review. Many of these topics deserve their own, discrete, nuanced standards, and failing to provide such standards could have unfortunate consequences (for example, it would be a shame if teachers gave equal bill to the rule of law and Shay’s Rebellion).

In a similar vein, the “distribution of power” strand contains six vaguely worded standards, which inexplicably cover everything from federalism to the roles of local elected

officials, electoral strategy, the president’s cabinet (again), and the administrative rulemaking process. What these topics are supposed to have in common with one another, or why “separation of powers” and “checks and balances” appear in a *different* strand, is anyone’s guess—nor is it clear why administrative rulemaking and the president’s cabinet deserve their own, discrete standards, while the topic of “political parties” is relegated to a lengthy laundry list.

As these examples suggest, there are persistent issues with organization and grain size, with the result that some essential topics receive only cursory coverage. For example, one standard in the strand on civil liberties, civil rights, and responsibilities suggests that students “use historic and modern case studies, including Supreme Court cases, amendment initiatives, and legislation to trace the application of civil liberties, civil rights, and responsibilities spelled out in the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, and other amendments” (U.S GOV 2.1). This standard could easily be split into five to ten standards—and it should be, unless the

state means to suggest that the president’s cabinet should receive as much attention as the Bill of Rights and the seventeen subsequent amendments.

In addition to the aforementioned strands, the Government course also includes an economics strand with somewhat vague references to taxation, fiscal decisions, and budget priorities, as well as a strand on foreign policy and international trade with little indication of specific content. Notably absent from the U.S. Government and Citizenship standards is any reference to comparative politics, the role of political parties, voting rights, equal protection, or due process.

To be fair, some of these topics could be addressed in other courses. Yet the standards for those courses provide little grounds for optimism. To wit, U.S. History 1 has a strand on the U.S. Constitution but offers no direction beyond the general expectations that students “study the structure and function of the government that the Constitution creates,” the evolution of citizens’ rights and responsibilities over time, and the Constitution’s status as “a transformative document that contributed to American exceptionalism” (USH1 4.4). Similarly, a strand on the development of political institutions and processes includes broad standards on political parties and “the expansion of democratic principles over time” but few specifics, and a strand on the Civil War and Reconstruction doesn’t mention the Reconstruction Amendments.

Similar observations apply to U.S. History 2, which covers industrialization, reform, Civil Rights movements, the New Deal, the Reagan presidency, and Supreme Court cases relating to technology (though no cases are specified). As this is a history class, it’s unlikely the civics aspects of these topics will be fully developed.

Finally, the Utah Studies course contains bits and pieces of civics, such as the political challenges to Utah attaining statehood and civic virtues codified in the state Constitution, and some of the “possible guiding questions” also address topics such as the balance of state and federal powers. However, the course doesn’t address nuts and bolts of civics.

Skills and Dispositions

As noted, the early grades are primarily about character development, and most grades tip their hat to civic participation. For example, second graders are encouraged

Strengths & Weaknesses of the Utah Civics Standards

Strengths

1. Most essential civics topics are mentioned at some point in the standards.
2. The K–6 standards emphasize respectful dialogue, and several standards for the middle and/or high school courses ask students to research and analyze a discrete civics issue.

Weaknesses

1. In general, the standards for grades K–6 have too little civics content.
2. The standards for the U.S. Government and Citizenship course are poorly organized, lacking in detail, and missing some essential content.
3. There is no suggested sequence for grades 7–12.

to identify and participate in a civic activity, and grade 3 includes indicators on “meaningful dialogue” and considering diverse viewpoints.

Skills development also receives significant emphasis in the courses for grades 7–12. For example, according to one U.S. Government and Citizenship standard,

Students will examine various perspectives on a current rights-related issue; take a position; defend that position using the Constitution and Bill of Rights, historical precedents, Supreme Court decisions, and other relevant resources; and share that position, when possible, with relevant stakeholders (U.S. GOV 2.2).

Students in this course are also expected to “propose and defend budget priorities at either the local, state, tribal, or federal level and share their findings with appropriate stakeholders” (U.S. GOV 4.3), as well as “craft an argument for an appropriate role for the United States to take in addressing a global economic, environmental, or social issue such as humanitarian aid, migration, pandemics, or the loss of wildlife habitat” (U.S. GOV 5.4).

Similarly, students in Utah Studies are to “make an evidence-based argument regarding the appropriate roles of local, state, and federal governments in resolving a current and/or historical issue” (U.T. 4.2), as well as “research issues of civic importance in which city, county, tribal, or state governments have a role” (UT 5.5) and “use their research to develop and write a policy proposal to the appropriate governmental entity, such as a board, commission, council, legislator, or agency” (also UT 5.5). Though perhaps somewhat repetitive, these standards get the most essential feature of civics skills development—that is, the importance of applying one’s knowledge, rather than expressing an uninformed opinion—exactly right.

Clarity and Organization: 2/3

Utah’s social studies standards documents are generally straightforward and usable, though the shift in formatting and organizational structure between the documents for grades K–6 and 7–12 is somewhat disruptive. However, the materials for grades K–2 are the least user-friendly, with the strands arranged in visually unhelpful columns under each grade, and the organization of content within the U.S. Government and Citizenship course is (as noted) somewhat

chaotic, with seemingly minor points mysteriously elevated to the level of “standard,” while major topics that could and should be their own, discrete standards are relegated to distressingly ambitious laundry lists.

Finally, the absence of any clear sequence at the secondary level is inherently problematic, for at least two reasons: First, there is a huge difference between seventh and twelfth grade, so it matters which grade a course like U.S. Government and Citizenship is taught in. Second, the absence of a clear sequence makes it difficult to understand how the various pieces are meant to fit together. For example, the bandwidth that teachers of U.S. Government necessarily depends on whether or not students have taken U.S. History.

U.S. History: C

In Brief

Utah offers two U.S. History courses, one in the primary grades and a second in two parts after grade 6. Although these courses manage to touch on many key points, detail is sorely lacking and explanatory depth is rarely offered.

Content and Rigor: 4/7

K-6

Utah’s K–2 social studies outlines look gradually outwards—from self to family, school, neighborhood, and community—while also touching on concepts of diversity, state and national symbols, holidays, and basic ideas of change over time. Grade 2 invokes Native Americans and immigrants, but there is no suggestion of any specific historical coverage.

Some bits of history surface in the third-grade Community and Culture course, such as a section on Native American cultures that includes a reference to the impact of European contact. Similarly, fourth grade’s Utah Studies course begins to introduce specifics on state history—but sporadically and thematically, focusing more on cultural diversity than events.

In contrast, fifth grade’s United States Studies course

introduces a chronological structure, offering a basic overview of U.S. History and the period prior to the Civil War in particular. The outline touches on the causes and impacts of European exploration and briefly considers economic and cultural impacts of colonization. Slavery is mentioned in the context of a list of groups enjoying varying degrees of freedom. Colonial governments are invoked, but their specific importance is not. Self-government is directly invoked only with the American Revolution, which is noted more than explained. The structure and evolution of the Constitution and Bill of Rights receive their own standard, though details remain meager, and the Iroquois Confederacy is inaccurately listed among “documents used to develop the Constitution” (5.III.1.a). A single, rushed standard covers the nineteenth century through the Civil War (westward expansion and sectional division are treated briefly and lead directly into slim coverage of the Civil War and references to postwar industrialization and immigration). Finally, an even more rushed standard attempts to cover everything else, starting with the two World Wars, the Great Depression, and the rise of the U.S. as a global superpower before considering twentieth-century reform movements (such as the Women’s and Civil Rights movements) and debates over America’s global role.

Although the fifth-grade outline covers the basics, it leaves a great deal of interpretation and elaboration to districts and teachers. Nor are the topics that are given short shrift in fifth grade likely to receive better treatment in sixth grade, which turns to introductory world history.

Subject-Specific Courses (Grades 7–12)

The course outlines for grades 7–12 include a two-part U.S. History survey and a separate Utah Studies course that offers a basic overview of state history. However, as noted in the Civics review, no specific sequence of courses is suggested.

U.S. History I covers the time period from precontact Native American civilizations through Reconstruction in seven largely chronological subsections (now called strands) that focus almost exclusively on broad issues (though specific points are sporadically raised in the “possible guiding questions” and the summary paragraphs that open each strand). To wit, reasons for and impact of European exploration are invoked but not discussed, as are the patterns of European colonization. The establishment of slavery in the colonies is mentioned, but the rise

of representative government is not. The shift toward independence is briefly outlined, but its causes are not, and similar items cover the fact of the Constitution and its importance but explain neither. The next strand then rushes through the emergence of political parties, early nineteenth-century reform movements (mentioning several specifically, though strangely listing “anti-immigration” as a reform), and the expansion of democratic participation. Another strand that covers territorial and industrial expansion from 1783 to 1890 (which is beyond the apparent scope of the course) makes two passing references to tensions over free versus slave states/territories, and a final strand provides cursory coverage of the Civil War and Reconstruction. Slavery is correctly noted as the principal cause of the war, but as elsewhere, the standards offer little explanation.

U.S. History II is marginally more specific. The first three strands look at industrialization, reform movements, and America’s global role from 1880 to 1920, though not in any real depth. Industrial technology and urban working populations are noted. Progressivism and some of its reforms are listed. Some specifics on Theodore Roosevelt’s foreign-policy approach and the WWI home front are mentioned. However, chronology is severely undermined

Strengths & Weaknesses of the Utah U.S. History Standards

Strengths

1. Utah offers two full U.S. History sequences, the first in grade 5 and the second in middle school and/or high school.
2. Many key topics are at least mentioned.

Weaknesses

1. There is a dearth of specific detail at all grade levels.
2. History-related research and analysis skills are not strongly emphasized.
3. Sequence is undefined after grade 6.

when the fourth strand turns to “traditions and social change” from 1920 to 1970, thus lumping 1920s conflicts over Prohibition, nativism, and science versus religion in with a very general item on the civil rights of African Americans and other groups, the 1960s counterculture, and Vietnam before the fifth strand jumps back to the Great Depression and its aftermath (the standard on the causes of the Great Depression is competent, but nothing specific is said about the New Deal). This is followed by a strand that deals with WWII and the start of the Cold War, which includes specific references to women in the workplace, the baby boom, total warfare tactics, the Holocaust, the atomic bomb, the Marshall Plan, and Berlin Airlift (but does little to tie them together). The seventh strand then covers the entire period from 1950 to 2000, touching on the Cold War and American social change. McCarthyism and Watergate appear only in the possible questions. Reagan and the New Right do get a specific reference in the standards, but the end of the Cold War is never directly referenced. A final strand glances briefly at recent global and domestic tensions.

Skills Development

History skills receive relatively little emphasis in the Utah standards. For example, grades K–2 offer little beyond references to change over time, and the course outlines for grades 3–6 invoke research and analytical skills only in passing (though the introductory material does urge avoidance of “‘present-mindedness,’ not judging the past solely in terms of the norms and values of today but taking into account the historical context in which the event unfolded”). Similarly, the content standards for U.S. History I and II include some research skills, such as comparing historians’ interpretations and use of sources. However, only primary sources are mentioned in U.S. History I (though secondary sources are mentioned once in U.S. History II).

Notably, Utah supplements these limited skills standards with links to the CCSS-ELA standards for literacy in social studies for grades 6–12. These high-quality materials address both reading and writing skills (analysis and producing written research products) in depth and are a valuable resource if teachers find and follow the links.

Clarity and Organization: 2/3

As discussed in the civics portion of this review, Utah’s social studies standards documents are generally usable, though the shift in formatting and structure between the K–6 and 7–12 documents is odd. Despite the lack of detail, the grade 5 course is clearly meant to offer a basic introduction to U.S. History, with emphasis on the nation’s foundations. However, as noted in the review of Civics, the intended sequence could be made clearer for the later two-part course (as well as the other courses for grades 7–12). Local districts and schools are plainly at liberty to place the two parts at their discretion, but state planners presumably had some sequence in mind, so a suggested plan would be helpful.

Recommendations

Civics

1. **Strengthen the K–6 civics content** (e.g., by addressing the three branches of government in fourth grade and the basics of comparative politics in sixth grade).
2. **Ensure that key topics are addressed in grades 7–12** (e.g., by adding standards or strands on due process, equal protection, voting rights, and comparative government to U.S. Government and Citizenship).
3. **Reorganize the first three strands of U.S. Government and Citizenship** into five to seven more tightly focused strands to ensure that essential topics are appropriately emphasized.

U.S. History

1. **Improve the substantive and explanatory depth of the U.S. History content** to promote shared exposure to essential material.

Both Subjects

1. **Provide a suggested sequence for the subject-specific courses in grades 7–12.**

Documents Reviewed

- “Utah State Office of Education Core Standards for Social Studies, K-6 (2010), Utah Studies, United States History I, United States History II, and United States Government & Citizenship (2017);” <https://www.schools.utah.gov/curr/socialstudies?mid=1129&aid=3>

Revisions to the Utah social studies standards are currently underway.

Vermont

A	Exemplary	10
	Standards worthy of implementation	9
B	Good	8
	Targeted revisions recommended	7
C	Mediocre	6
	Significant revisions strongly recommended	5
D	Inadequate	4
F	Complete revision recommended before implementation	3
		2
		0-1

Civics: F

Content & Rigor: 0/7

Clarity & Organization: 0/3

Total Score: 0/10

U.S. History: F

Content & Rigor: 1/7

Clarity & Organization: 0/3

Total Score: 1/10

Overview

Vermont's standards for civics and U.S. History are inadequate. They fail to provide even basic coverage of most essential content. A complete revision is recommended before implementation.

Description of the Standards

Vermont provides "Sample Social Studies Graduation Proficiencies and Performance Indicators" derived nearly verbatim from the National Council of Social Studies' C3 Framework that are to be achieved at the end of grades 2, 5, 8, and 12. This brief document is divided into seven strands, or "graduation proficiencies," which include inquiry, civics, economics, geography, history, evaluating sources and evidence, and communicating conclusions and taking informed action. Each strand is divided into categories, each of which includes one or more performance indicators.

Notably, Vermont is one of a handful of states that don't require high school students to take courses in civics or U.S. history.

Civics: F

In Brief

Vermont's civics standards are inadequate, failing to provide even basic coverage of most essential content.

Content and Rigor: 0/7

K-8

Vermont's standards are notably devoid of content even among the subset of states that focus on skills, as opposed to knowledge. For example, a second-grade standard that reads, "Describe roles and responsibilities of people in authority" would benefit greatly from the addition of language specifying what kinds of authority figures and what kinds of responsibilities it wants students to learn about (D2.Civ.1). And a fifth-grade standard that asks students to "explain how policies are developed to address public policy problems" (D2.Civ.13) is indicative of the empty civic calories this document is serving Vermont's students.

The closest Vermont gets to delineating actual civics content is a grade 8 standard that asks students to "analyze ideas and principles (e.g., rule of law, limited government, judicial review, and popular sovereignty) contained in the founding documents (e.g., Declaration of Independence, Articles of Confederation, and U.S. Constitution) and explain how they influence the social and political system" (D2.Civ.8). This standard does direct educators to key primary sources and provides some key terms on which to focus. What it does not do is actually explain those key terms or point to parts of those key sources that might focus an inquiry. And even at the eighth-grade level, for every standard that aims towards content, there are two or three hopelessly vague ones, such as, "Compare historical and contemporary means of changing societies, and promoting the common good" (D2.Civ.14).

High School

Vermont provides precisely eight civics-related standards at the high school level. Furthermore, although the K-8 indicators gain a modicum of substance as the grade level increases, the high school standards represent a step backwards. For example, a standard that asks students

to "evaluate social and political systems in different contexts, times, and places" would be much stronger if it provided examples of such systems, times, or places. And a breathtaking instruction to "explain how the U.S. Constitution establishes a system of government that has powers, responsibilities, and limits that have changed over time and that are still contested" elides numerous key concepts that the eighth-grade standards at least mention, such as rule of law and limited government.

Finally, Vermont's standards do not even pretend to ask students to learn about minority groups of any kind or the fight for equality in American civic history. Civil rights, suffrage, and equal protection receive no mention whatsoever.

Skills and Dispositions

Basic coverage of certain features of critical thinking can be found in three graduation proficiencies. For example, "evaluating sources and using evidence" includes gathering information from sources and distinguishing fact from opinion. Similarly, "communicating conclusions and taking informed action" focuses on constructing, presenting, and critiquing arguments/explanations. However, many of the indicators housed within these proficiencies are vague (e.g., "critique arguments for credibility").

Civic dispositions are alluded to in the organizing statement ("acquiring the ability to become engaged") and again in the early grades ("explain how people can work together to make decisions in the classroom"). However, at no point do

Strengths & Weaknesses of the Vermont Civics Standards

Strengths

1. The eighth grade standards begin to coalesce around some key content.

Weaknesses

1. There is no content outline for civics and thus no hint of scope or sequence.

Vermont’s standards urge teachers to cultivate other essential civic dispositions, such as respect for differing points of view, an inclination to serve, or a commitment to constitutional democracy.

Clarity and Organization: 0/3

Vermont’s social studies standards document is easy enough to follow, but it hardly contains anything to follow. Purely conceptual proficiencies, categories, and indicators fail to outline any substantive content or to define any sequence or scope in any subject area. And the organization of all civics “content” into three categories—participation and deliberation, civic and political institutions, and processes, rules, and laws—is confusing and insufficient.

U.S. History: F

In Brief

Unfortunately, there is no history in Vermont’s history standards.

Content and Rigor: 1/7

K-8

All of the performance indicators for Vermont’s history strand are purely conceptual. For example, the indicators for the band ending in grade 2 focus on concepts of chronology, such as comparing past and present, differences between past and present perspectives, and reasons for historical events. Similarly, the indicators for the end of grade 5 ask students to (among other things) compare “specific historical time periods” to today, summarize and compare different kinds of historical sources, and summarize the central claim in a secondary source (oddly, although the standards refer to “secondary works” several times, the term “primary source” is never used). Finally, by the end of grade 8, students are expected to analyze connections among events and developments and relevant individuals or groups, detect limitations in the historical record by examining multiple sources, organize evidence into a coherent argument about the past, and so on.

Although the skills listed are certainly worth acquiring, no historical event, individual, or even basic time period is mentioned anywhere in the history strand, nor is there any hint of what U.S. history concepts should be taught in which grades or whether it should be taught at all. The only scrap of historical content is the reference to the founding documents—the Declaration of Independence, Articles of Confederation, and Constitution are mentioned (but not the Bill of Rights)—in the civics strand. In fact, the United States is never even mentioned outside of civics.

High School

Like the K-8 indicators, the seven indicators for the high school grade band are purely conceptual, though they do aim for greater developmental sophistication.

Students are now to evaluate how historical events and developments were shaped by unique circumstances, individuals, groups, and historical contexts, in addition to analyzing change and continuity in historical eras, and how historical context shapes people’s perspectives, historical sources, and later history. They are also to evaluate sources for their usefulness, limitations, and accuracy, analyze “complex causes and effects,” distinguish between long-term causes and specific triggering events, and integrate multiple sources and interpretations into “a reasoned argument about the past.”

Again, skills worth acquiring. Yet there is not a single reference to any actual history. No U.S. History sequence is suggested. Content outlining is literally nonexistent. Ironically, the introductory material asserts that the standards are meant to assist schools and districts “in developing learning requirements and expectations,” to “promote consistency” across schools and districts, and “help build curriculum.” Yet in reality, the standards provide no assistance at all on content, sequence, or substantive curriculum, and the complete lack of guidance guarantees that there will not be consistency in U.S. History education across Vermont.

Skills Development

In addition to the conceptual skills that make up the entirety of the history strand, three graduation proficiencies address broad social studies skills. For example, “inquiry” focuses broadly on generating questions and supporting questions,

views on interpretations and “disciplinary concepts,” and identifying sources with which to develop questions. Similarly, “evaluating sources and using evidence” includes gathering information from sources and distinguishing fact from opinion (for example, by grades 8 and 12, students are to assess the origin and context of sources, evaluate their credibility, identify limits and inconsistencies, and develop claims and counterclaims). Finally, “communicating conclusions and taking informed action” focuses on constructing, presenting, and critiquing arguments/ explanations. Although many indicators in this proficiency are vague (e.g., “critique arguments for credibility”), those on presentation do mention “essays” and “reports” alongside speeches, posters, and multimedia, providing a bit of substantive guidance around written presentation.

Clarity and Organization: 0/3

As discussed under Civics, Vermont’s social studies standards provide no meaningful guidance to follow. U.S. History sequence and scope are literally nonexistent. There is no hint of what time periods should be covered when, let alone any guidance on essential substantive content. The short standards document would make a reasonable skills-focused appendix, but U.S. History standards as such simply do not exist in Vermont.

Strengths & Weaknesses of the Vermont U.S. History Standards

Strengths

1. Vermont’s social studies standards offer some guidance on history-related skills.

Weaknesses

1. Vermont’s social studies standards don’t contain any actual history.

Recommendations

Both Subjects

1. Take an entirely different approach to standards by providing substantive content guidance.
2. Specifically require that high school students take at least one year of U.S. History and one semester of Civics.

Documents Reviewed

- “Global Citizenship – College, Career and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards, Sample Graduation Proficiencies & Performance Indicators,” 2018, <https://education.vermont.gov/sites/aoe/files/documents/edu-proficiency-based-education-global-citizenship-social-studies.pdf>

Virginia

A	Exemplary	10
	Standards worthy of implementation	9
B	Good	8
	Targeted revisions recommended	7
C	Mediocre	6
	Significant revisions strongly recommended	5
D	Inadequate	4
F	Complete revision recommended before implementation	3
		2
		0-1

Civics: B+

Content & Rigor: 6/7

Clarity & Organization: 2/3

Total Score: 8/10

U.S. History: B+

Content & Rigor: 6/7

Clarity & Organization: 2/3

Total Score: 8/10

Overview

Virginia’s civics and U.S. History standards are good. The state’s failure to articulate a clear course sequence beyond K-3 is unfortunate, given the strength of the content. In addition to the continued implementation of the current standards, some targeted revisions are recommended.

Description of the Standards

Virginia provides “standards of learning” documents for individual grades K-3, plus a series of courses not linked to specific grades, including Virginia Studies, a two-part U.S. History survey, and Civics and Economics, as well as required high school courses on Virginia and United States History and Virginia and U.S. Government. The K-3 standards of learning outlines include five strands: skills, history, geography, economics, and civics. The courses invoke those same strands as applicable, plus subject-specific subdivisions (such as historical eras). And each strand or subdivision includes one or more numbered key standards, which are disaggregated into more specific subitem standards. In addition to the standards of learning, curriculum framework documents for each grade or course present essential understandings, essential knowledge, and sample “experiences” for individual standards or groups of standards. Because these additional materials include substantive content guidance, they are the focus of this review.

Civics: B+

In Brief

Virginia’s standalone civics standards are quite comprehensive, and they are bolstered by unusually strong history standards that add context and depth to many civics topics.

Content and Rigor: 6/7

K-3

Virginia incorporates substantive civics information into its social studies standards early and often. For example, in addition to traditional topics, such as good citizenship and patriotic symbols, the standards for Kindergarten include the expectation that students identify the president as the leader of the United States. Similarly, grade 1 introduces the concepts of state and local government, as well as voting, and grade 2 returns to voting with a brief overview of representative government and the idea of equality under the law. Finally, in grade 3, students learn about the birth of democracy in Greece and republican government in Rome, as well as the community, state, and national levels of government in the contemporary United States.

Subject-Specific Courses for Grades 4–8

Although the Virginia Studies course is largely a march through the history of the Old Dominion, because of the state’s unique role in American History, that march includes items such as the General Assembly in 1619 and the House of Burgesses in the 1640s, why James Madison is called the “Father of the Constitution,” and how African Americans fought to have power in Virginia’s government during the Reconstruction period. Similarly, the two-year U.S. History survey (which seems to be intended for middle school) covers numerous topics that are relevant to civics. Specifically, the first half of the survey includes the historical development of the Constitution and a brief overview of the three branches of government, as well as quick references to the establishment of the federal courts and the emergence of political parties, while the second half includes

a brief description of the Reconstruction Amendments, a discussion of racial segregation that touches on the role of Congress (e.g., the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882) and the Supreme Court (e.g., *Plessy v. Ferguson* and *Brown v. Board of Education*), and the expansion of Civil Rights for a variety of groups in the twentieth century.

To the extent that this history survey and the Virginia Studies course serve as the bridge between the third-grade civics content and the first designated civics course, called Civics and Economics, they could perhaps pay a bit more attention to the mechanics of the three branches of government. However, the standards for Civics and Economics itself are impressive. Commendably, they start with fundamental principles such as rule of law and consent of the governed. They then continue with the Declaration of Independence, the Articles of Confederation, and documents that influenced the Constitution and Bill of Rights. Numerous standards address the structure, powers, and interactions of the three branches of the federal government (and Virginia’s government also receives multiple well-executed standards). Coverage of electoral politics is unusually strong and includes topics such as the role of the media, interest groups, and third parties, as well as campaign finance. Finally, the economics portion of the course discusses taxation, federal regulation, goods and services provided by the government, and local, state, and federal government budgeting process (among other topics).

There are a few lapses. For example, although Federalism has its own standard, it is less detailed than other standards, as are the standards on foreign policy and the United States’ role in the world. And though the First, Fifth, and Fourteenth Amendments get special treatment, it would be nice to see the Fourth and Sixth Amendments added to the list. However, the biggest problem is structural: Without knowing exactly when Civics and Economics is meant to be taught, it’s impossible to say if it’s well sequenced (much less developmentally appropriate). For example, if it’s taught after Virginia Studies but before the two-year U.S. History survey, it may be hard for students to process the torrent of civics topics to which they are exposed (and even if it comes after U.S. History, the content is quite sophisticated for a middle school audience, especially in its treatment of campaign finance and the government’s role in the economy).

Subject-Specific Courses for High School

Perhaps the biggest difference between the middle school Civics and Economics course and the high school Virginia and United States Government course is that the latter devotes significantly more attention to Virginia’s government and constitution, with numerous standards referencing the state government alongside the federal government. However, the high school course also dives much deeper into political history and philosophy, with standards that ask students to describe the development of Athenian democracy and the Roman republic, examine British constitutional documents, become familiar with Enlightenment philosophers, and study the Declaration of Independence through a natural rights lens.

In addition to these strengths, the high school course includes unusually sophisticated coverage of the judicial branch, which includes expectations that students track a Supreme Court case from *writ of certiorari* to the assignment of the majority opinion, compare judicial activism and restraint, and explore how the Supreme Court has applied most of the protections of the Bill of Rights to the states through a process of selective incorporation. Frequently neglected topics such as redistricting, voter turnout, and political ideologies also receive their own standards at the high school level, and the treatment of campaign finance law is unusually thorough. Finally, the standards covering the government’s role in the economy are again impressive.

Although it’s not clear if it’s meant to come before or after the course on government, the Virginia and U.S. History course also provides excellent coverage of the political experiences and Enlightenment ideas that resulted in the Constitution, as well as the formation of political parties, foundational Supreme Court cases, the women’s suffrage movement, and the leaders, legislation, and Supreme Court cases of the Civil Rights movement—all of which help to convey the story of civics, in addition to the mechanics. Frankly, the name of the course notwithstanding, civics topics get considerable breathing room in Virginia and United States History (for example, one standard addresses the role of the U.S. Supreme Court in defining a constitutional right to privacy, affirming equal rights, and upholding the rule of law). Still, there is room for improvement when looking across both high school courses. For example, the coverage of comparative politics is largely limited to a discussion

of unitary and federal systems, and the standards on the executive and legislative branches aren’t as thorough as those on the judicial branch. Finally, after the heavy emphasis on early American history, it’s a little surprising and disappointing that the Voting Rights Amendments are never properly contextualized.

Skills and Dispositions

Virginia’s standards address a variety of civics skills and dispositions in the primary grades. Specifically, the K–3 civics standards stress traits of good citizens such as respect, self-control, and truthfulness, as well as informed decision-making and the importance of collaboration and compromise. For example, the grade 3 curriculum frameworks suggest that students weigh the costs and

Strengths & Weaknesses of the Virginia Civics Standards

Strengths

1. Virginia offers two full U.S. Civics courses, and its history courses (especially Virginia and United States History) further augment the understanding of civics.
2. Many civics topics are handled in significant depth and with increased sophistication in the curriculum frameworks, particularly the role that the government plays in the economy.
3. Virginia takes skills development seriously, with numerous thoughtful standards and suggested experiences.

Weaknesses

1. No course sequence is defined after grade 3.
2. Coverage of federalism (in middle school) and comparative politics (in high school) is relatively weak.

benefits of the following statement: “Everyone keeps their own supplies, or everyone shares their supplies.”

Both the middle school and the high school civics courses begin with numerous standards that enhance critical thinking skills. For example, the essential knowledge for the Civics and Economics course asks students to determine cause and effect, consider alternatives, distinguish between fact and opinion, and compare and contrast viewpoints. Meanwhile, the “suggested experiences” (better known as student assignments) include reviewing campaign ads and creating a voters’ guide, researching an issue and creating an action plan, writing a newspaper editorial, and charting the governor’s daily activity.

Similarly, the course on Virginia and the United States Government has standards for synthesizing information from diverse sources, analyzing political and economic trends, and evaluating the accuracy and validity of information. The suggested experiences for this course, such as analyzing the United States Naturalization Test for the influence of particular political philosophies, are again well- conceived.

Clarity and Organization: 2/3

The various standards documents are clearly presented and easily usable. The curriculum frameworks add extensive additional material in acceptably readable columns, following a straightforward internal organization. The major problem is the absence of suggested course sequences after grades K–3 (where civics content and skills are articulated by individual grade level). It is not clear when the various civics and history courses that have been outlined are to be taught.¹ Even if final decisions are left to local school districts, it would be simple enough to offer a suggested sequence clarifying the state’s intentions.² Without this guidance, readers have no indication of the target age for the courses.

Finally, the conceptual and cognitive leap from the K–3 civics content to the two civics courses is a bit steep, even taking into account the history courses that are presumably sandwiched between them. Building a better on-ramp of civics content through the other grades—as well as including course sequences—would make a big difference.

U.S. History: B+

In Brief

Virginia offers two full U.S. History courses, which are often impressively detailed. However, there are a few places where coverage is patchy, and the failure to assign courses to any specific grade level is a problem.

Content and Rigor: 6/7

K-3

The standards for early grades are a largely conventional medley of history-related content. Kindergarten focuses on concepts of chronology, local community, holidays, and traditions. Grade 1 turns to Virginia history, with references to Jamestown, Washington, and Jefferson; selected “influential people” (including Powhatan and Arthur Ashe); and present-day state communities. Grade 2 surveys the United States, touching on changes in technology and transportation, American Indian cultures (specifically the Powhatan, Lakota, and Pueblo), and a selection of important individuals ranging from Columbus to Lincoln to Helen Keller, Thurgood Marshall, Rosa Parks, and Martin Luther King Jr. Finally, grade 3 looks broadly at ancient cultures.

Subject-Specific Courses for Grades 4–8

Although there are no specific grade-level requirements after grade 3, Virginia does outline a one-year course in Virginia History and two-part U.S. History course that must be geared towards the middle grades.

The Virginia Studies course covers state history from Native American peoples to the twentieth century. The course outline is unevenly detailed but is particularly strong on the early Virginia colony (including discussion of early representative government and the establishment of slavery), the Revolutionary era, the sectional schism through Reconstruction, Jim Crow (though the Klan is not mentioned), and the Civil Rights movement. A reference to “economic differences” between North and South is problematically evasive, but the framework’s “essential knowledge” does clarify the centrality of slavery.

The first half of the first U.S. History course, which covers everything up to 1865, begins with broad coverage of early Native American cultures and lifeways, European exploration, European-Native contact, and West African cultures. Regional differences between British settlements are discussed in patchy detail. British taxes and American resistance are covered reasonably well, though the reasons for opposition to British taxation aren't clearly articulated. The list of key Revolutionary people and events is fragmentary, but the Articles of Confederation are well outlined. The first five presidencies are each given a few specifics before a chronologically messy unit on territorial expansion from 1801 to the 1850s, which is followed by technological change, Abolitionism, the Women's Suffrage movement, and the issues and events of the sectional crisis. The latter is covered in reasonable detail (though simply noting "moral" objections to slavery doesn't adequately explain Northern antislavery views), and slavery is correctly emphasized as "the principal states' rights issue leading to the Civil War." Finally, Civil War individuals and events are noted selectively, with detail offered on the experiences of women and African Americans.

The second half of the first U.S. History course, which covers everything from 1865 to present, is weaker than the first. The coverage of Reconstruction is reasonably specific (though a reference to carpetbaggers who "took advantage of the South" is problematic). However, the standards provide uneven and chronologically jumbled coverage of Western expansion, immigration, the rise of Jim Crow, industrialization, the Labor movement, renewed Women's Suffrage efforts, Progressive reforms, America's global role, WWI, and technological innovation. The Depression and the New Deal are rushed, though coverage of World War II is stronger. Finally, the origins of the Cold War and post-War era are jumbled together: McCarthyism is never mentioned, the end of the Cold War is included with its origins, and the post-War economy segues into recent globalization, before looping back to the Civil Rights movement and Women's Rights efforts, recent technology, and contemporary issues (such as debates over climate change, dependence on foreign oil, and The Homeland Security Act).

High School

Despite the misleading emphasis on Virginia in the title, the high school course is focused on U.S. History, from European exploration/settlement to the present. Explanatory detail in the framework is extensive and often impressive. For

example, coverage of the Colonial era includes both the rise of self-government and the entrenchment of slavery, as well as economic, religious, and regional developments. And there is much solid content on the Revolution, Declaration of Independence, Articles of Confederation, and Constitutional Convention, despite occasional errors (for example, the three-fifths clause did not count slaves "as three-fifths of the population"). However, discussion of the French and Indian War is rather skimpy, the *reasons* for Colonial objections to British taxation are still not adequately explained, and the crucial presidential precedents of Virginia's own George Washington are unfortunately neglected.

Jumbled chronology is a persistent problem in the remainder of the course. For example, Westward expansion through the 1840s is discussed before the War of 1812, Jacksonian democracy, and the reform movements. The sectional schism is treated in reasonable detail before jumping to the nascent Women's Suffrage movement, then back to Manifest Destiny and its connections to the sectional crisis. Placing tariff

Strengths & Weaknesses of the Virginia U.S. History Standards

Strengths

1. Virginia offers two full U.S. History courses—the first introductory and the second more advanced.
2. The curriculum frameworks' course outlines are often impressively substantive and detailed, particularly at the high school level.
3. Considerable attention is devoted to the cultivation of worthwhile history-related skills.

Weaknesses

1. Virginia offers a variety of course outlines but fails to indicate which courses are intended for which age/developmental level after grade 3.
2. Course outlines can be problematically patchy, and chronological organization can be improved.

disputes before slavery among causes of the Civil War is a problem, although the centrality of slavery in the territories is correctly noted. Finally, coverage of the Civil War itself is spotty, despite strong points (like discussion of Lincoln’s beliefs and vision for the country), and rival Reconstruction plans are well described.

Although chronology remains messy, the rise of Jim Crow and early Civil Rights efforts, as well as urbanization, industrialization, and the Labor movement, are well covered. Similarly, coverage of the United States’ global expansion, World War I, and its aftermath is efficient (although suppression of domestic dissent and the First Red Scare go unmentioned). Regrettably, discussion of the 1920s omits African American culture. And although the roots of the 1929 crash are covered in unusual depth, Roosevelt and the New Deal are barely mentioned. World War II is covered in considerable detail, and the origins of the Cold War properly note the genuine threat of Soviet totalitarianism. Thematic organization again makes a jumble of chronology in the postwar era. The standards move from Vietnam and 1970s diplomacy to Cuba in the 1950s–60s to McCarthyism and the Cold War at home to Reagan and the end of the Cold War and so on. The Civil Rights movement, Reaganism, recent presidencies, and more are covered, but the messy chronology undermines historical context.

Skills Development

The first standard for each grade level or course is devoted to skills, often with extensive elaboration in the curriculum framework documents. For example, historical sources are introduced in Kindergarten, including definitions of primary and secondary sources, discussion of fact versus fiction, and concepts of past versus present. The first, two-part U.S. History survey course is particularly strong on skills development, introducing more advanced research concepts, such as identifying arguments in sources, assessing multiple claims, detecting bias and propaganda, distinguishing fact from opinion, avoiding plagiarism, and stating conclusions with supporting details. Finally, the skills standards in the high school U.S. History course are fairly rigorous, indicating a more ambitious examination of a range of sources, emphasizing research from multiple sources, and asking students to pursue more independent research (though, unfortunately, the standards on written presentation place greater emphasis on trendier formats such as “a social media or blog post”).

Clarity and Organization: 2/3

As discussed in the Civics review, Virginia’s standards and framework documents are clear and usable, but the failure to clearly define a course sequence after grade 3 is a problem.

The scope of the U.S. History standards is clear: two full courses are offered (the first in two parts), and the intended coverage of each is readily apparent from the often-detailed outlines (though the title of the Virginia and U.S. History course is somewhat misleading). However, too little information is offered on what is to be taught at what age level—and it matters. For example, even if the two-part course is intended for elementary/middle grades and the Virginia and U.S. History outline is intended for the high school level (as seems to be the intent), there is a big difference between fourth grade and seventh grade and also a big difference between twelfth grade and ninth grade.

Recommendations

Civics

- 1. Bolster the coverage of key civic concepts** including Federalism and the Fourth and Sixth Amendments (at the middle school level) and comparative politics and the legislative and executive branches (at the high school level).
- 2. Build a better bridge between the K–3 civics content and Civics and Economics.**

U.S. History

- 1. Improve chronological organization.**
- 2. Plug the specific gaps in coverage** in the often-solid U.S. History courses.

Both subjects

- 1. Clarify the suggested sequence** for U.S. History and Civics, as well as the intended age and/or developmental level for each course
- 2. Preserve the considerable strengths of the current standards in the forthcoming review process.**

Documents Reviewed

- Virginia History and Social Science Standards of Learning and Curriculum Frameworks: 2015, https://www.doe.virginia.gov/testing/sol/standards_docs/history_socialscience/

Reviewers examined Virginia’s standards documents that were in use before the minor updates that occurred in December 2020.

Revisions to the Virginia Social Studies standards are currently underway.

ENDNOTES

1. The Virginia Department of Education does include on its website a document called, “[History and Social Science Standards of Learning Skills’ Progression Chart](#).” Although it does not articulate course sequences, it maps which skills—such as “using information sources to analyze and interpret artifacts, primary and secondary sources”—are to be introduced when (by individual K–3 grade level and/or course).
1. In fact, some Virginia school districts do post on their website course sequences for their high school social studies programs. See Fairfax County Public schools as an example: <https://www.fcps.edu/academics/graduation-requirements-and-course-planning/high-school-course-sequencing/social-studies>.

Washington

A	Exemplary	10
	Standards worthy of implementation	9
B	Good	8
	Targeted revisions recommended	7
C	Mediocre	6
	Significant revisions strongly recommended	5
D	Inadequate	4
	Complete revision recommended before implementation	3
2		
0-1		

Civics: D

Content & Rigor: 2/7

Clarity & Organization: 1/3

Total Score: 3/10

U.S. History: D

Content & Rigor: 2/7

Clarity & Organization: 1/3

Total Score: 3/10

Overview

Washington’s recently updated civics and U.S. History standards are inadequate. With the exception of skills, most essential content is missing—especially in high school—and there are various organizational challenges. A complete revision is recommended.

Description of the Standards

After an extensive introduction that includes “learning goals” and “guiding principles,” Washington presents outlines for four grade bands (K-2, 3-5, 6-8, and 9-12). Within each of these bands, “performance standards” are organized into five “disciplines”: social studies skills (which are “overarching”), civics, economics, geography, and history. Each performance standard is associated with one more “enduring understandings,” which are followed by grade-specific “components” and “sample questions” (except in high school, which is divided into two grade bands), as well as cross references (“‘since time immemorial’ connections”) to Washington’s tribal history—a required topic since 2015.

Notably, in addition to one credit of U.S. History and Government, the state now requires that students earn half a credit in civics to graduate.

Civics: D

In Brief

In general, Washington’s civics standards are light on specifics, and the high school standards, which pay far too little attention to the U.S. government, are particularly contentless.

Content and Rigor: 2/7

K–5

Washington’s civics standards are organized under four overarching concepts: (1) the key ideals and principles of the United States; (2) the purposes, organization, and function of governments laws and political systems; (3) the purposes and organization of tribal and international relationships and U.S. foreign policy; and (4) civic involvement. However, a lack of detail in the standards’ first three concepts reduces the value of the slightly more developed fourth concept (see *Skills and Dispositions*).

At the K–5 level, the performance standard relating to key ideals and principles focuses on the importance of rules, democratic principles, and cooperation—but only in general terms. For example, the “common good” receives quite a bit of attention in grades K–2, while grades 3–5 shift to “core virtues and democratic principles.” But which particular virtues and principles the state would like teachers to emphasize remains unclear, even higher grades.

Some expectations pertaining to “governments, laws, and political systems” are also vague. For example, one third-grade standard suggests that students “identify the basic function of government and laws in the community or city” (C2.3.2). However, this standard becomes more rigorous and detailed as the grade level increases. For example, there is a notably clear fifth-grade component on the “basic duties” of the three branches of government and “why the framers of the U.S. Constitution felt it was important to establish a government with limited powers that are shared among different branches and different levels (e.g., local, state, federal)” (C2.5.1). Finally, the suggested progression for the standard addressing “tribal and international relationships”

is strange: Fourth graders “recognize that tribes have lived in North America since time immemorial” and define tribal sovereignty (C3.4.1). Yet instead of connecting this idea to some other aspect of “international relationships,” fifth grade repeats a previous component on the three branches of government.

6–8

In middle school, the standards include a few more specifics. For example, sixth graders are expected to learn about works such as the Code of Justinian and Magna Carta in relation to the “foundational documents” of the United States, while eighth graders are expected to explore ideals and principles outlined in the Declaration of Independence, the U.S. Constitution, and the Bill of Rights. This single standard includes a great deal of important content, such as the rule of law, representative government, due process, and freedom of expression. Yet it’s all far too condensed.

Meanwhile, the “international relationships” standard gives equal billing to a series of unhelpfully vague components: Sixth graders “analyze how societies have interacted with one another” (C3.6-8.1). Seventh graders “analyze how international agreements have affected Washington state” (C3.6-8.2). Finally, eighth graders “analyze how the United States has interacted with other countries” (C3.6-8.6). But no specific societies, agreements, or interactions are mentioned.

Notably, despite the fact that eighth-grade history includes the Civil War and Reconstruction, there is no reference to *Dred Scott v. Sanford*, the Civil War Amendments, or equal protection in the eighth-grade civics standards.

High School

Washington’s high school civics standards are particularly weak, due a near total absence of specifics. For example, ninth and tenth graders are asked to “explain the origins, functions, and structure of government” (C2.9-10.2). But the standards don’t say *which* government(s), structures, or functions or how far back in history one goes to discover its “origins.” Similarly, much attention is paid to analyzing and evaluating “systems,” but the language is too broad to provide educators with meaningful direction. For example, eleventh and twelfth grade students are asked to “evaluate the effectiveness of the American system compared to international governmental systems” (C2.11-12.3). But the

standards don't provide any indication of how "effectiveness" might be evaluated or to which specific systems the American one should be compared. Finally, the expectation that students "evaluate the impact of constitutions, laws, treaties, and international agreements on the maintenance of national and international order or disorder" would take several lifetimes to meet if taken literally (C3.11-12.1).

In some cases, the "sample questions" for high school provide a bit of additional information. For example, one question asks, "What are the costs and benefits of isolationism vs. expansionism?" which could make for an interesting class discussion, provided students have already been introduced to both concepts and taught a great deal of specific history (see the U.S. History review). However, a question that asks, "In what ways does the federalist system resolve conflicts in a consistent and equitable way?" is vague and confusing.

Alas, that is the only reference to federalism in the standards, nor are the legislative, executive, or judicial branches mentioned in high school—though students are expected to evaluate the effectiveness of checks and balances in our system. Nor is there any mention of due process, judicial review, equal protection, or electoral process.

Simply put, there is almost no specific U.S. government content in the high school civics standards.

Skills and Dispositions

Washington places significant (if broad) emphasis on civic skills and dispositions in the performance standards addressing "civic involvement." For example, Kindergarteners are expected to "demonstrate that good citizenship is to follow the established rules of a classroom and school community" (C4.K.2)," while first graders are expected to "describe the importance of civic participation and identify neighborhood examples" (C4.1.3). Similarly, students in grades three through five are to recognize various meanings and forms of civic participation. However, starting in middle school, the "civic involvement" standard gets murky. For example, sixth graders are mysteriously asked to "describe the historical origins of civic involvement" (C4.6-8.1), while seventh graders are to "describe the relationship between the actions of people in Washington state and the ideals outlined in the Washington state constitution" (C4.6-8.2). Similarly, students in grades 11-12 are to "analyze and

evaluate ways of influencing local, state, and national governments and international organizations to establish or preserve individual rights and/or promote the common good" (C4.11-12.2). Why not reference a few Supreme Court cases or the boycotts of apartheid?

Clarity and Organization: 1/3

In general, Washington's civics standards are well written, although some of the jargon (e.g., "components" and "enduring understandings") is a barrier to understanding. However, the organization of the standards by grade band

Strengths & Weaknesses of the Washington Civics Standards

Strengths

1. The elementary and middle school standards provide clear coverage of founding documents, the three branches of government, the separation of powers, and federalism.
2. "Civic involvement" skills receive consistent attention across grade levels, as students are encouraged to recognize and fulfill their responsibilities as citizens.

Weaknesses

1. The high school standards pay too little attention to U.S. government.
2. Many standards are too broad to provide useful guidance.
3. The organization of the standards is not user-friendly.
4. There is almost no attention to electoral process.
5. There is no mention of equal protection.

and discipline isn't user-friendly. At the elementary and middle school levels, where civics and U.S. History are typically integrated with one another, the focus on grade bands means the expectations for these disciplines are scattered across the document (for example, the eighth-grade civics standards on the Constitution appear several pages before the eighth-grade U.S. History standards). In fact, even *within* disciplines, grade-level content is scattered across multiple pages.

Finally, despite the fact that Washington students must take courses in civics and U.S. History and Government to graduate high school (and an introduction that assigns U.S. History to eleventh grade and Civics to twelfth grade) the high school civics components are inexplicably distributed between the 9–10 and 11–12 grade bands.

U.S. History: D

In Brief

The U.S. History standards come across more like a set of aspirational “learning goals” than an actual content outline that identifies what students are supposed to know. Furthermore, the dearth of specific content hinders the emphasis Washington attempts to place on skills development.

Content and Rigor: 2/7

K–5

The history strand includes the same four performance standards across K–12: “understands historical chronology,” “understands and analyzes causal factors that have shaped major events in history,” “understands that there are multiple perspectives and interpretations of historical events,” and “understands how historical events inform analysis of contemporary issues and events.”

In the K–5 grade levels, students are supposed to learn about chronology, timelines, contributions by various groups, multiple perspectives on the nation's history, and using historical sources as evidence. Broad references are made to events, ideas, and issues such as the establishment of

the American colonies and the American Revolution, but those references are few and far between (with virtually no specific references in grades K–3). Fifth graders, for example, are expected to “analyze and explain how individuals have caused change in United States history” (H2.5.1), with no indication of which individuals and what types of changes. The “sample questions” include a handful of specific national and state references, such as to the Declaration of Independence and to the Stevens Treaties and Pig War (per Washington state history). But they are wholly insufficient for the elementary grades.

6–8

Grade 6 focuses on World History, grade 7 on Washington State History, and grade 8 on U.S. History. The last focuses on the founding of the United States and the writing of the U.S. Constitution, concluding with Reconstruction. The rationale for limiting the grade 8 course reads as follows:

The recommended context for developing this understanding is U.S. History and government, 1776 to 1877. Students explore the ideas, issues, and events from the framing of the Constitution through Reconstruction, although beginning before this context or extending beyond it is up to the discretion of each district.

Given the cursory treatment of U.S. History in grades K–5, this time-limited focus might be welcomed if it were sufficiently detailed, but it is not. Historical content is almost nonexistent, although there are glimmers of substance. For example, consider the following eighth-grade standard:

Explain how themes and developments help to define eras in United States history from 1763 to 1877, including (1) [f]ighting for independence (1763–1783); (2) [e]stablishing the new nation (1781–1815); (3) [s]lavery, expansion, removal, and reform (1801–1850); and (4) Civil War and Reconstruction (1850–1877). (H1.6–8.6)

This is about as close as the middle school history standards come to providing specific guidance to teachers. Other “strands,” such as civics and economics, mention historically relevant concepts such as American foreign policy, slavery as a labor system, and monetary policy, but again, no significant factual information is provided.

High School

The final grade band, which should in theory be spent gaining deeper understanding of more rigorous historical material, is instead met with the same lack of detail. Despite the fact that a course on U.S. History is a high graduation requirement in Washington, the introductory material for the grade 9–12 band refers to the relevant historical periods as “recommended context.” For example, the “recommended context” for eleventh grade is U.S. History from 1877 onwards.

Perhaps because of the surplus of context, vague standards are again the norm. For example, students are expected to “evaluate how historical events and developments were shaped by unique circumstances of time and place as well as broader historical contexts” (H1.11-12.1), as well as “assess the social, economic, and political factors affecting cultural interactions” (G1.11-12.6).

As elsewhere, a few crumbs of historical material can be found in other strands and under the “sample questions.” For example, under the grade 9–12 geography strand, there are references to the “dust bowls in the 1930s,” the colonization of the Americas by the Spanish, and World War II. Similarly, a sample question in the 9–12 history strand asks, “How did the Civil Rights movement define U.S. History after WWII?” However, it’s hard to see how students could answer this question without detailed knowledge of these two seminal events in America’s history.

Skills Development

The standards include an overarching social studies skills strand wherein “the student understands and applies reasoning skills to conduct research, deliberate, and form and evaluate positions through the processes of reading, writing, and communicating.”

However, though these are worthy goals, their integration with the other strands is far from seamless. Similarly, the history strand includes skills that focus on chronological reasoning, causation, contextualization, making connections, evaluating multiple perspectives, and analysis, as well as citing textual evidence and evaluating sources for credible information. Understandably, emphasis is also placed on reading, writing, and communicating effectively. However, when these skills aren’t embedded within rich, substantive content, they appear fragmented and disconnected.

Clarity and Organization: 1/3

As noted in the Civics portion of this review, Washington’s history standards aren’t effectively organized. Readers must skip over large sections of the document to see how the standards for a particular grade level relate to one another, and tracking progressions across grade bands is even more difficult. Furthermore, the U.S. History sequence itself is flawed, as it relegates the crucial Colonial period to fifth grade. However, the biggest organizational issue from a history standpoint is that there is no chronology or coherent outline of historical content. In other words, these aren’t really “history standards.” They are “learning standards” that mainly focus on skills and concepts.

Strengths & Weaknesses of the Washington U.S. History Standards

Strengths

1. History-related skills development is strong throughout the document.

Weaknesses

1. There is almost no specific historical content in the history standards.
2. Many standards are too broad to provide useful guidance.
3. The standards’ organization is not user-friendly.

Recommendations

Civics

1. **Make the U.S. government the focus of the high school civics standards** (e.g., by giving each branch of government its own discrete, nuanced standard and specifically addressing federalism, judicial review, due process, equal protection, and electoral process, among other topics).
2. **Ensure that civics content is aligned with grade-level content for U.S. History** (e.g., by including the Articles of Confederation, the Constitutional Convention, *Marbury v. Madison*, *Dred Scott v. Sanford*, and the Civil War Amendments in the eighth-grade civics standards).

U.S. History

1. **Organize the history standards around commonly taught eras in American history instead of skills and broad concepts.**
2. **Offer a full introduction to U.S. History in the elementary grades, followed by another full pass in higher grade levels.**

Both subjects

1. **Provide more specific and rigorous content guidance in all grade levels.**
2. **Organize the K–8 content by grade level and the high school content by course.**

Documents Reviewed

- "Washington Social Studies Learning Standards," 2019, https://www.k12.wa.us/sites/default/files/public/socialstudies/standards/OSPI_SocStudies_Standards_2019.pdf

The standards were last revised and adopted in February 2021.

West Virginia

A	Exemplary	10
	Standards worthy of implementation	9
B	Good	8
	Targeted revisions recommended	7
C	Mediocre	6
	Significant revisions strongly recommended	5
D	Inadequate	4
	Complete revision recommended before implementation	3
F		2
		0-1

Civics: C

Content & Rigor: 4/7

Clarity & Organization: 2/3

Total Score: 6/10

U.S. History:¹ C+

Content & Rigor: 4/7

Clarity & Organization: 2/3

Total Score: 6/10

Overview

West Virginia’s civics and U.S. History standards are mediocre. Commendably, the state offers two full passes through U.S. History, plus a full year of high school civics. However, the quality of individual standards is uneven, and some essential content is missing or seriously underemphasized. Significant revisions are strongly recommended.

Description of the Standards

West Virginia offers social studies content outlines for individual grades K-8 and for nine high school courses including Civics, United States Studies, Contemporary Studies, and “United States Studies—Comprehensive” (which covers most of the material in United States Studies and Contemporary Studies in one year instead of two). Each individual outline begins with a paragraph describing the content to be covered, which is followed by tables presenting the grade- or course-specific standards. Within each grade and course—including the aforementioned high school courses—these standards are organized into four strands: civics, economics, geography, and history (grades K-5 also include a strand on West Virginia history).²

To graduate high school, students must take at least one year of civics (or government) and at least one year of U.S. History (or U.S. Studies).

Civics: C

In Brief

West Virginia’s civics standards are uneven. On the one hand, some standards ask for higher-level analysis or seek to engage the students with well-conceived simulations and role-playing activities. On the other hand, some essential content is missing or seriously underplayed, and many standards are too broad or nebulous to provide educators with much direction.

Content and Rigor: 4/7

K-8

In early grades, the West Virginia civics standards focus on age-appropriate themes such as rules, leadership, and conflict resolution. For example, one standard notes that Kindergarteners “explore the consequences for not following the rules” (SS.K.3). However, the wording of many standards is vague. For example, first graders are expected to “apply the process of how leaders are selected and analyze how they influence decisions made in the school and the community” (SS.1.4). In grade 2, students are to “illustrate the levels of government (local, state, and national).” Grade 3 explores concepts such as rule of law, liberty, justice, and basic comparative politics. Still, even for the grade level, the content is rather thin.

Fourth grade, which focuses on U.S. History from colonization to “westward expansion prior to 1854,” is an obvious opportunity for civic learning. Yet the standards struggle to take advantage of it. To wit, one overburdened standard asks students to “compare and contrast the powers of each branch of government” and “identify the responsibilities and rights of United States citizens” (SS.4.2). Presumably, the standard is talking about the powers to make, enforce, and interpret the law rather than any specific powers of Congress. However, because there are at least thirty rights in the U.S. Bill of Rights alone, it’s not clear what educators are supposed to do with the second half of the standard. Similarly, one ambitious but vague standard asks students to identify, explain, and “critique” commonly

held American democratic values and principles through consideration of the “Declaration of Independence, U.S. Constitution, Bill of Rights, etc.” (SS.4.1). Even if one ignores the “etc.,” greater specificity is required. After all, there are many values and principles embodied in the founding documents. So which ones should educators prioritize in students’ first encounter with them?

The standards for grade 5, which cover the Civil War through the United States’ “emergence as a superpower,” include appropriately specific references to *Dred Scott* and the Civil War Amendments. They also ask students participate in a mock trial and a lawmaking simulation—welcome opportunities to internalize key concepts at an age that students can appreciate them. However, another inscrutable standard about “applying” the process through which amendments are made to “daily life” and “the lives of others and lives of people throughout history” could safely be replaced with a straightforward expectation that students know the contents of the First Amendment.

Grade 6 completes the first U.S. History survey, covering everything from World War I to the present. Here, the civics standards are a hodgepodge, jumping unpredictably between key leaders in the federal government, patriotism and civil discourse, different forms of government through the lens of twentieth-century history, how a bill becomes a law, and international relief organizations. As discussed in the U.S. History portion of this review, coverage of the African American and Women’s Civil Rights movements is somewhat cursory at the K-8 level, with no specific references to the Nineteenth Amendment, *Brown v. Board of Education*, or important pieces of legislation.

The civics standards for seventh grade, which covers World History, consist of a reasonably clear standard on different forms of government, plus three woolly standards that suggest students “recognize and examine” patriotism and nationalism, explore the rights and responsibilities of free and enslaved peoples across time in various civilizations, and evaluate how the global landscape has changed over time. What seventh-grade teachers are supposed to do with the last three standards is anyone’s guess, and even the standard on forms of government would be stronger if it referenced some of the canonical examples (e.g., Athenian democracy and the Roman Republic).

Finally, the civics standards for the grade 8 course on “West Virginia Studies” loop back to citizen participation, the (unspecified) rights of West Virginian and United States citizens, and the three branches of the state and federal government—though like many other standards, the standard on the three branches tries to do too much. The economics strand also looks at the government’s various sources of revenue, while the history thread covers the Constitutional Convention, the Progressive Movement, and women’s suffrage, among other topics. Given the focus on the role of state government, a standard on federalism would be an appropriate addition to the eighth-grade civics standards, ideally with references to the Supremacy Clause and the Tenth Amendment.

High School

Like the standards for the lower grades, the standards for the high school Civics course are uneven. The course, which is described as a “culminating” course with a U.S. Studies course as a prerequisite, begins with a reasonably clear series of standards for the events, documents, and ideas that contributed to the founding of the nation, an assessment of the “compromises” of the Constitutional Convention, and how the Constitution has been modified as a “living document” to “meet the changing needs of society.” Subsequent standards focus on federalism, the incorporation of the Bill of Rights, and freedoms of speech and press. Several ambitious standards deal with the judicial branch, focusing on legal precedent, jurisdictional issues, and civil versus criminal law (but without suggesting any specific cases). Finally, one particularly strong set of standards focus on “special interest groups,” campaign finance, and the media (the media standard, which includes references to push polls and reporting news out of context, is particularly compelling).

Still, despite some decent general coverage, the manner in which the standards aggregate important concepts leaves much to be desired. For example, consider the following expectation:

Investigate the system of government created by the Preamble, Seven Articles, the Bill of Rights, and other Amendments of the U.S. Constitution to evaluate how the framework for American society is provided (SS.C.8).

To provide useful guidance, this standard needs to be broken into much more focused pieces. For example, each of the first three articles deserves at least one discrete and appropriately nuanced standard, as do the more important amendments. Without that additional detail, essential content is badly shortchanged. To wit, there are no high school standards that specifically focus on the legislative or executive branches, nor is there any specific coverage of the amendment process or the naturalization process.

Despite references to the rule of law, individual rights, and the Fourteenth Amendment, the words “due process” and “equal protection” do not appear in the high school standards. And despite the aforementioned focus on campaigns, there is nothing specific on the nuts and bolts of the electoral process (e.g., redistricting, the primary system, the Electoral College, and voter access policies), nor is there anything that could be described as “comparative politics” (e.g., an expectation that students consider the strengths and weaknesses of unitary, confederal, and parliamentary systems or alternatives to “first-past-the-post” elections). Finally, although most of the high school standards are comprehensible, one in particular is notably opaque:

Strengths & Weaknesses of the West Virginia Civics Standards

Strengths

1. The three-year, introductory pass through U.S. History in grades 4–6 creates numerous opportunities for civic learning in these grades.
2. Well-conceived simulations and role-playing activities should help to bring the content to life.

Weaknesses

1. Many standards are too broad or nebulous to provide useful direction.
2. Crucial topics are missing or seriously underdeveloped (e.g., the executive and legislative branches).

Consider the factors that subvert liberty (including lack of education, voter apathy, disenfranchisement, civil inequalities, economic issues, lack of public trust, and misuse of government power), then collaborate, compromise, and by consensus create a model that informed citizens can use to defend and perpetuate the American Republic (SS.C.4).

Like other standards, this one is trying to do too much.

Speaking of which, the high school Civics course also includes a set of “personal finance” standards that deal with the cost of postsecondary education, causes of bankruptcy, practices of savvy consumers, and advantages and disadvantages of different types of consumer debt. Although some of this content appears quite practical and useful for young adults, plopping it into a high school Civics course makes no sense.

In addition to Civics, West Virginia high school students are also required to take a course in “United States Studies—Comprehensive,” AP U.S. History, or (as of this school year) a two-year U.S. History sequence on “United States Studies” and “Contemporary Studies.”³

Commendably, the standards for the “United States Studies—Comprehensive” course list key Supreme Court cases (which are unfortunately missing from the civics standards), in addition to topics such as the national debt, New Deal legislation, and the PATRIOT Act. And, in addition to those subjects, the two-year sequence touches on concepts such as rule of law, tariffs and taxes, women’s suffrage, and the Civil Rights movement. Finally, some notable civics is covered in the mandatory World History course, including the evolution of legal codes, political ideologies, the Enlightenment, and world aid organizations. However, even when these courses are taken into consideration, many holes in the high school civics standards remain unplugged.

Skills and Dispositions

Although West Virginia doesn’t have a separate skills strand or progression in its social studies standards,⁴ many civics standards are implicit skill-building exercises with the potential to engage students in the content. For example, fifth graders are to “assume a role (e.g., judge, juror, prosecutor, etc.) in a mock proceeding (*John Brown*,

Dred Scott, etc.) to acquire understanding of the trial-by-jury process and justify its effectiveness in solving conflicts in society both past and present.” Similarly, eighth graders are to “predict the outcome of selected proposed bills in a current legislative session and assume the role of a lawmaker in a mock legislature to pass a bill into law” (SS.8.5).

The high school Civics course includes several standards that promote critical thinking and problem analysis. For example, one standard asks students to “explore cooperation, competition and conflict among nations through organizations, agreements and protocols, political acts and other exchanges—such as the United Nations, international treaties and terrorism—to evaluate potential solutions to global issues” (SS.C.21).

Finally, the cultivation of civic dispositions is a goal of many standards, several of which include calls for service learning, and the first standard for the high school course reads simply, “Strive to become vigilant, informed citizens who actively participate in the preservation and improvement of American government through community service and service-learning (e.g., individual service projects, patriotic events, mock trials, group initiatives, community volunteerism)” (SS.C.1).

That is the right message.

Clarity and Organization: 2/3

West Virginia’s social studies standards are usable. However, some individual standards aren’t very clear, and the division of content into “strands”—even in subject-specific high school courses—is cumbersome. Furthermore, because the elementary and secondary standards are separated from one another on the DOE website, it’s hard to see how the standards build on one another (particularly at the elementary level, where the social studies standards are embedded in the elementary standards for all subjects in one set of “resource booklets”).⁵

Still, the civics standards do recognize that the U.S. History sequence creates numerous opportunities for civic learning, and that sequence, plus the year-long Civics course, should give teachers plenty of time to address the civics content that West Virginia has outlined in its standards—and some that it hasn’t.

U.S. History: C+

In Brief

Commendably, West Virginia offers two full passes through U.S. History, one in grades 4–6 and a second in high school. Yet many individual standards are broad or vague, and strand-based organization too often fragments what should be related content.

Content and Rigor: 4/7

K–8

Though the general concepts identified in the K–2 grade band are age appropriate, the content standards themselves are vague. An otherwise conventional progression of coverage from the local community to the state to the nation doesn't include specific historical information about any of these levels. In fact, not one noteworthy individual is even named.

Fortunately, the standards become more substantive starting in grade 3, which broadly introduces Native American cultures and European exploration. Even at this level, many standards focus more on concepts (such as Native American settlement patterns and the motives for European exploration) rather than specific individuals or events. Still, several prominent explorers and European powers are named.

Grade 4 begins a three-year pass through U.S. History by introducing students to the growth of the United States from the Colonial period into the antebellum era. The outline touches on many of the essentials, including colonial regions, the French and Indian War, Declaration of Independence, Articles of Confederation, etc.—but with little explanation. For example, “British colonial policies and American colonists’ early resistance” are simply mentioned. The emergence of slavery is noted in the economics strand, but the rise of representative government is missing entirely. Issues of the early Republic such as political parties and the expansion of slavery are listed, along with some specifics of westward exploration and expansion, Indian removal, and transportation, but not Jacksonian democracy.

Grade 5 covers the second third of American history, from the Civil War to the United States’ emergence as a global

power, in similarly uneven fashion. Abolitionism and “other social reforms” are broadly noted, and sectionalism is correctly attributed to “issues of slavery in the territories,” but specifics such as the Missouri Compromise and Kansas-Nebraska are never mentioned (*John Brown and Dred Scott* appear, without explanation, under civics). Basic essentials of the Civil War and Reconstruction are listed, including the Reconstruction Amendments and Freedmen’s Bureau, but post-Civil War content is highly patchy. Westward expansion mainly focuses on transportation advances (the impact on Native Americans is mentioned under economics). The Spanish-American War, Panama Canal, and naval buildup are noted but with little context. Finally, coverage of industrialization mostly focuses on new technologies, only briefly mentioning immigration, big business, and “reform movements”—but not the labor movement or Progressivism specifically.

Grade 6 completes the first survey, with a similar mix of basic essentials and wide gaps. For example, although the standards reference broad events that led to WWI (the rise of nationalism, imperialism, and militarism), they fail to provide any specifics that led to America’s entry. Similarly, students are supposed to learn about the causes of and responses to the Great Depression, but none are specified. Perhaps most egregious, though there are some specifics for WWII and the Cold War, not a single key figure or event is mentioned for the Civil Rights movement. Post-1960s coverage consists largely of broad references to terrorism and the Middle East.

After grade 7 turns to world history, grade 8’s “West Virginia Studies” course offers a reasonably strong overview of West Virginia history. Content is still noted more than explained, but quite a bit is noted, including much that overlaps with general American history, from western Virginia’s role in the French and Indian War to notable Revolutionary battles in the region to the state’s split with Virginia during the Civil War (though slavery isn’t specifically cited as a factor) and on through the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

High School

After a year of “World Studies” in grade 9, West Virginia’s tenth graders can choose between a year of “United States Studies—Comprehensive” and a two-year sequence that includes “United States Studies” and “Contemporary Studies.” In general, the content items for these courses offer more supporting/explanatory examples than those in earlier

grades, but detail remains highly uneven. Furthermore, content is still split into four strands, pulling some historical material out of the history strand.

The first half of the two-year sequence (“United States Studies”) attempts to cover everything from the early colonies to World War I. However, the establishment of slavery and of representative government is missing entirely; there is only a broad reference to “religious, social, political, and economic differences” between “each colonial region” (the triangular trade is mentioned, but not explained, in the economics strand). Colonial charters, Magna Carta, and more are cited as influences on the Constitution, yet the “strengths and weaknesses of government under the Articles of Confederation” are not explained. The election of 1800 appears as an example of party politics, but the Washington presidency is not mentioned. Antebellum reform movements are noted, but Jacksonian democracy is not. And chronology remains erratic: a list of Supreme Court decisions runs from *Marbury v. Madison* to *Plessy v. Ferguson*.

The centrality of slavery in the antebellum crisis is suggested, but events of the sectional schism barely appear (items such as “examine the cause and effect of the formation of the Confederate States” offer little explanation). Coverage of Reconstruction points to broad themes and mentions many essentials (e.g., Radical Republicans, the Freedman’s Bureau, the Reconstruction Amendments, and Jim Crow laws) without tying them together. Coverage of the Gilded Age and U.S. global expansion continue this pattern, though a good deal is at least mentioned, including the rise of corporations and industry, Populism and Progressivism, labor and reform movements, urbanization and immigration, specific expansionist policies, the Spanish-American War, and technological advances.

“Contemporary Studies” covers the second half of U.S. History, from 1914 to the present. Like the U.S. Studies course, the outline touches on many key points, at least mentions a number of specifics, and remains highly uneven. For example, the 1920s receive a fair amount of detail, but the New Deal is reduced to a single expectation that students “investigate the expansion of government with New Deal legislation and resulting deficit spending.” Similarly, though coverage of WWII is again reasonably specific, the entire Cold War is packed into a single standard. Competing ideologies, containment doctrine, and more are noted, but

a standard that asks students to “analyze and explain the political, social, and economic causes and consequences of American involvement in the Korean Conflict and Vietnam” is decidedly rushed.

Notably, a somewhat better-crafted standard on civil rights efforts touches on the Jim Crow system, Civil Rights court cases, and the role of activists (including not only Martin Luther King but also the Black Panthers, SCLC, AIM, and the Chicano movement, among others). However, rather than mentioning specific events and legislation (e.g., the Civil Rights Act of 1964) the standards suggest that students create a timeline of “key people, places, and events” of the Civil Rights movement. Final standards hastily deal with post-WWII suburbanization and cultural change, a smattering of political scandals, global issues such as trade and terrorism, and—in somewhat more detail—the U.S. role in the world since 9/11.

The outline for the single-year “United States Studies—Comprehensive” course tries to address the contents of

Strengths & Weaknesses of the West Virginia U.S. History Standards

Strengths

1. West Virginia offers two full courses in U.S. History: one across grades 4–6 and another in high school.
2. Many key points in U.S. History are at least noted, and supporting detail is sometimes strong.
3. The grade 8 course on West Virginia State History complements and extends the content standards for U.S. History.

Weaknesses

1. Many standards lack specific historical details (e.g., important individuals or events).
2. Strand-based organization fractures or scatters what should be related content.

both “United States Studies” and “Contemporary Studies” in roughly as many standards as each of those courses receives individually—and it shows. Most of the detail and depth offered by the two-part high school outline is replaced by a brief and extremely general checklist of key topics. Oddly, some specifics that are absent from the two-year outline (such as the Panama Canal and the annexation of Hawaii) are present in the “Comprehensive” version. But mostly, the one-year outline is strikingly thinner. Specific factors driving the creation of the Constitution are no longer noted. Slavery is mentioned in connection with the Constitution but not with the Colonial period, antebellum crisis, or Civil War. Late-nineteenth-century social/economic development, America’s global expansion, the World Wars, Depression and New Deal, postwar America, and contemporary issues are all covered—but often only just. And again, the standards dealing with the Cold War and Civil Rights movement lack any reference to specific people or events.

Skills Development

The introduction to the various grade bands states that “all West Virginia teachers are responsible for classroom instruction that integrates content standards, foundational skills, literacy, learning skills, and technology tools.” And overall, the West Virginia standards do help teachers to integrate such content and skills. Although the indicators that introduce each grade band are fairly vague (e.g., “apply disciplinary concepts and tools” and “evaluate sources and use evidence”), they progress in difficulty and sophistication with each grade band and are fairly strong at the high school level. For example, the first history indicator in grades K–2 asks students to “create a chronological sequence of multiple events,” while students in grades 3–5 are to “create and use a chronological sequence of related events to compare developments that happened at the same time” and students in grades 9–12 must “evaluate how historical events and developments were shaped by unique circumstances of time and place as well as broader historical contexts.”

Similar progressions for skills pertaining to generating questions, comparing the past and present, and explaining causes and effects are also effectively developed across the three grade bands. Still, because these indicators are presented separately, they can come across as disconnected from the U.S. History sequences.

Clarity and Organization: 2/3

Commendably, West Virginia offers two full passes through U.S. History—one in grades 4–6 and another in high school. However, as noted in the Civics portion of this review, the division of content into “strands” is unhelpful, especially in high school—repeatedly fracturing or scattering what should be related content. Furthermore, the various standards documents are hard to find on the state education website (often requiring several clicks),⁶ and the “standards booklets” for elementary school include *all* the standards for individual grade levels, making it difficult to see how the social studies content fits together. In practice, offering a substantially thinned-down outline for the one-year course in “United States Studies—Comprehensive” is also problematic, as even the two-year outline is rather thin (though of course, nothing prevents the state from providing better outlines for both options).

Recommendations

Civics

1. **Give each individual standard a specific focus** instead of lumping every founding document, article, amendment, or branch of government into one overly broad standard.
2. **Bulk up the high school Civics course** (e.g., by adding discrete, nuanced standards on the legislative and executive branches, as well as due process, equal protection, and comparative politics).
3. **Wherever possible, include some well-chosen examples** (e.g., specific principles, rights, amendments, Supreme Court cases, acts of Congress, etc.).

U.S. History

1. **Improve substantive content coverage** by addressing the specific gaps noted in the review.
2. **Strengthen the outline for “United States Studies—Comprehensive”** so the course lives up to its title.

Both subjects

1. **Improve the organization by eliminating strands at the high school level.**

Documents Reviewed

- “West Virginia College- and Career-Readiness Standards for Social Studies,” 2016, <https://apps.sos.wv.gov/adlaw/csr/readfile.aspx?DocId=27577&Format=PDF>

ENDNOTES

1. Because reviewers had discretion to add a “+” or “-” to a state’s letter grade, some states earned slightly different grades despite receiving identical scores.
2. We evaluated the West Virginia College- and Career-Readiness Standards for Social Studies as they appear in the Legislative Rule (Title 126F). However, West Virginia Department of Education also provides “Resource Booklets” that mirror the Social Studies standards presented in the legislation, along with standards for all the other content areas in grades K-5 (including English language arts, mathematics, science, technology and computer science, and more). Resource booklets for social studies in grades 6-12, which replicate the material in the legislation, are also available, and the DOE website also includes a resource where users can view the grade- and course-level standards via “tabs” that show the content by area of study (civics, economics, geography, and history).
3. <https://apps.sos.wv.gov/adlaw/csr/readfile.aspx?DocId=52997&Format=PDF> (pg. 11).
4. A separate set of standards called the West Virginia College- and Career-Readiness Standards for Student Success include the “knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed to be successful in higher education and/or training that lead to gainful employment.” These standards include a number of broad, grade-band skills and dispositions related to personal and social development, academic learning, career/life planning, and global citizenship.
5. The social studies standards do appear by themselves in the Legislative Rule, but that’s likely not the version that teachers use.
6. To locate the middle and high school social studies standards, for instance, one must click “Teaching and Learning” on the home page, then “Middle and Secondary Learning,” then “Social Studies,” then “Resources,” and then a link called “West Virginia College and Career Readiness Standards, Resource Booklet for Social Studies Grades 6-12.”

Civics and U.S. History

Wisconsin

A	Exemplary	10
	Standards worthy of implementation	9
B	Good	8
	Targeted revisions recommended	7
C	Mediocre	6
	Significant revisions strongly recommended	5
D	Inadequate	4
F	Complete revision recommended before implementation	3
		2
		0-1

Civics: F

Content & Rigor: 1/7

Clarity & Organization: 1/3

Total Score: 2/10

U.S. History: F

Content & Rigor: 1/7

Clarity & Organization: 1/3

Total Score: 2/10

Overview

Wisconsin’s civics and U.S. History standards are inadequate. In general, they fail to furnish teachers and students with a solid roadmap for high-quality civics and history instruction. A complete revision of the standards is recommended.

Description of the Standards

Wisconsin’s “Standards for Social Studies” are divided into five strands: geography, history, political science, economics, and behavioral sciences (a sixth strand, which focuses on “inquiry practices and processes,” is meant to serve as an “umbrella strand” for the other five). Each of these strands is divided into broad “standard statements,” which are subdivided into “learning priorities.” Finally, each learning priority is furnished with “performance indicators” for each of four grade bands: K-2, 3-5, 6-8, and 9-12.

Notably, Wisconsin is one of a handful of states that don’t specifically require high school students to take courses in U.S. History and Civics, though students are required to earn at least three credits of social studies including state and local government.

Civics: F

In Brief

With few exceptions, Wisconsin’s standards for civics are too vague and broad to provide educators or other stakeholders with useful direction.

Content and Rigor: 1/7

Wisconsin’s civics standards provide almost no content guidance, focusing instead on important but overly broad themes. For example, students in grades K–2 are expected to “summarize situations where individuals have rights, freedoms, and equality” (SS.PS2.b.2), which is manifestly impossible without more specific information and direction. Similarly, students in grades 3–5 are to “provide examples of how different governments solve problems” (SS.PS3.d.5). Yet, no specific governments are mentioned, so it’s not clear if the standard is referring to local, state, and national governments of the United States or the governments of different countries—nor is there any attempt to narrow the infinite universe of such problems.

And so it goes. Middle schoolers are expected to “summarize the importance of rule of law” (SS.PS1.a.m), but it would be much more useful to supply teachers with the elements to be summarized (for example, one big idea is that laws should be clear, public, and prospective in application if they carry a penalty, and another important principle is that they should be written and enforced equally against everyone—including those in power). Similarly, one high school indicator suggests that students “analyze the foundational ideas of United States government that are embedded in founding-era documents” (SS.PS1.b.h). Even fifteen to twenty words explaining what those “foundational ideas” might be (e.g., due process, limited government, and separation of powers) would make a world of difference.

By not including such specifics, the standards leave teachers (and their districts) to fend for themselves. Yet the indicators cited in the previous paragraphs are models of reason compared to the expectation that students “investigate how principles expressed in the Declaration of Independence, Constitution (including the Preamble and the

Bill of Rights) have been applied throughout United States history, including how they may have evolved over time” (SS.PS1.b.m). This single indicator covers about half of what is typically considered civic education—but not in a way that is useful to teachers. And the same could be said of the elementary, middle, and high school indicators that suggest students classify, analyze, and evaluate “the structure and functions of governments at the local, state, tribal, national, and global levels” (SS.PS3.c.h). Yet another indicator suggests that students “compare and contrast the political, social, and economic status of marginalized groups both historically and in the present, both in the United States and worldwide” (SS.PS2.c.m), which is patently absurd.

Every now and then, the standards allude to the existence of specific content, yet even in these rare cases, that content is often flawed. For example, students are expected to “analyze the rights and responsibilities of citizens (i.e., voting, jury duty, paying taxes, obeying laws)” (SS.PS2.b.m). Even if one grants that there is a “right to vote” (though no such right is articulated in the U.S. Constitution) there are many other rights that students should know about—and more than three “responsibilities.”

Strengths & Weaknesses of the Wisconsin Civics Standards

Strengths

1. Some essential skills are covered in the “inquiry” strand.

Weaknesses

1. Most standards are too broad and vague to be useful.
2. The breadth and vagueness of the standards means most essential content is never mentioned.
3. There is no attempt to assign content to any specific grade level or course.
4. There is little discussion of civic dispositions.

Skills and Dispositions

Skills and dispositions are minimally developed across grand bands, most directly under the umbrella strand on inquiry practices and processes. The front matter to the standards explains that the sequence of the performance indicators is intended to be “developmentally appropriate” for each grade band. Yet often the early grade skills are simply a vaguer rendering of an already vague standard for higher grades. For example, high school students are expected to “communicate conclusions while taking into consideration that audiences from diverse backgrounds (e.g., gender, class, proximity to the event or issue) may interpret the information in different ways” (SS.Inq.4.a.h). Yet the K–2 standard simply asks students to “communicate conclusions.”

Unfortunately, the performance indicators in the “civic literacy” strand aren’t much better. For example, students in grade K–2 are expected to “compare and contrast perspectives on the same topic” in grades K–2 (SS.PS4.a.e).

Notably, the “inquiry practices and processes” strand includes a standard on civic engagement. Yet only one expectation appears in this space: “Explore opportunities for personal or collaborative civic engagement with community, school, state, tribal, national, and/or global implications.” This expectation is repeated verbatim for each grade band within K–8 and only marginally augmented at the high school level.

To be fair, the Wisconsin standards do *allude* to critical dispositions, such as respect for other people and opinions and an inclination to learn, participate, and serve relative to social and political issues. For example, high school students, as part of the standards on fundamentals of citizenship, are expected to “demonstrate the skills necessary to participate in the election process (i.e., registering to vote, identifying and evaluating candidates and issues, and casting a ballot).”

Clarity and Organization: 1/3

The Wisconsin standards document is clearly organized and relatively user-friendly. However, the lack of anything resembling a scope or sequence makes it almost useless to educators. It would certainly be preferable for the standards to specify content for individual grade levels rather than grade

bands, if only to force those writing them to be more specific and give a bit more thought to how the material ought to be sequenced.

U.S. History: F

In Brief

Like the civics standards, the Wisconsin history standards are problematically vague and underdeveloped, offering no content guidance beyond bare lists of historical eras.

Content and Rigor: 1/7

The history strand opens with seven “topics for exploration,” which include historically marginalized groups; human and civil rights; the movement of people, goods, and services; and the history, culture, and tribal sovereignty of the federally recognized American Indian tribes and bands located in Wisconsin.

After identifying these topics, a brief list then identifies eleven periods in Wisconsin history, nine periods in U.S. History, and six periods in world history that students are expected to “focus on.” However, with the exception of this list, the standards make no distinction between Wisconsin, U.S. or world history. Instead, four purely conceptual standards apply equally to each of the three categories of history across all four grade bands: (1) historical evidence for determining cause and effect; (2) patterns of continuity and change over time and contextualization of historical events; (3) connecting the past to the present; and (4) evaluating sources to interpret historical context, audience, purpose, or point of view.

Because these same standards apply to Wisconsin, U.S., and world history, articulating what students are expected to know and do across the grade bands is often just a matter of inserting a different introductory verb or a few additional words. For example, K–2 students are to “describe the events that led to the creation of a primary source,” grade 3–5 students are to “describe the historical context (situation) of a primary or secondary source,” grade 6–8 students are to

“explain how the historical context (situation) influences a primary or secondary source,” and grade 9–12 students are to “analyze how the historical context (situation) influences a primary or secondary source.”

Even as skills standards, these are barely sufficient. However, the bigger issue is the total absence of any discernible scope or sequence. For example, high school students are expected to “analyze significant historical periods and their relationship to present issues and events.” Yet no historical periods (other than those listed in the prefatory material) are provided, nor are any present happenings to which they are to be compared. And the same problem applies to every other elementary, middle, or high school standard.

In short, Wisconsin seems to have abdicated its responsibility to delineate what its young people should learn about their nation’s past.

Skills Development

Wisconsin’s Standards for Social Studies do a better job of describing history-related skills and their development than providing actual content to teach and learn history. For example, as explained in the Civics review, an entire

strand is dedicated to inquiry practices and processes, such as developing claims using evidence to support reasoning. Similarly, the four key history standards themselves (see above) allude to skills rather than content due to their focus on causation, making connections, identifying perspectives, and so on.

Clarity and Organization: 1/3

As noted in the Civics portion of this review, the Wisconsin standards document is clearly organized and written in a manner that is relatively easy to understand. However, the absence of anything resembling a scope or sequence makes it almost useless to educators.

Notably, the prefatory lists periods in Wisconsin, United States, and world history that precede the history strand include more bullets for Wisconsin than they do for the U.S. or the world. Unfortunately, this gives the impression that Wisconsin history is more important to students’ education than U.S. or world history—which it is not.

Strengths & Weaknesses of the Wisconsin U.S. History Standards

Strengths

1. Skills relevant to the practice of history are reasonably well articulated.

Weaknesses

1. There is no discernible scope or sequence.
2. No specific historical content is associated with any grade band.
3. The introductory lists of eras in Wisconsin, U.S., and world history suggest that the first of these topics should be given the most class time across grade levels—which it should not.

Recommendations

Civics

1. Whenever possible, identify the *specific* principles, institutions, and processes that students should know or understand.
2. Cultivate essential civic dispositions more consistently.¹

U.S. History

1. At a minimum, clearly specify the eras and themes that teachers should cover in each grade band.
2. Lay out two full U.S. History sequences, one for elementary and middle school and another for high school.

Both Subjects

1. Provide much more substantive and specific content guidance for all grade bands.
2. Provide a suggested grade-level sequence within each grade band for each subject.
3. Specifically require that high school students take at least one year of U.S. History and one semester of Civics to graduate. (Note that the absence of such requirements did not affect Wisconsin's grades, which reflect the quality of its standards.)

Documents Reviewed

- "Wisconsin Standards for Social Studies," 2018, https://dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/imce/standards/New%20pdfs/2018_WI_Social_Studies_Standards.pdf

ENDNOTES

1. Per the Civics criteria, "Students should be personally committed to the preservation of constitutional democracy and the realization of freedom, justice, and equality—recognizing that these ideals mean different things to different people and are sometimes in tension with one another."

Wyoming

A	Exemplary	10
	Standards worthy of implementation	9
B	Good	8
	Targeted revisions recommended	7
C	Mediocre	6
	Significant revisions strongly recommended	5
D	Inadequate	4
	Complete revision recommended before implementation	3
2		
0-1		

Civics: F

Content & Rigor: 1/7

Clarity & Organization: 1/3

Total Score: 2/10

U.S. History: F

Content & Rigor: 1/7

Clarity & Organization: 1/3

Total Score: 2/10

Overview

Wyoming's civics and U.S. History standards are inadequate, failing to offer even a basic outline of essential content. A complete revision is recommended before implementation.

Description of the Standards

The Wyoming Social Studies Content and Performance Standards are organized into four grade bands (K-2, 3-5, 6-8, and 9-12), with each band divided into six strands or "content standards."

At the end of each grade band (i.e., in second, fifth, eighth, and twelfth grade) are benchmarks, as well as "performance-level descriptors" for each benchmark. Students' performance is classified as "advanced, proficient, basic, or below basic" based on whether they meet expectations "independently," "consistently," via "partial mastery" or are "unwilling or does not address" expectations (respectively).

Notably, Wyoming is one of a handful of states that don't require students to take civics or U.S. History in high school.

Civics: F

In Brief

Wyoming’s paltry collection of civics benchmarks provide almost no useful guidance to educators, and a dearth of essential content is compounded by poor organization.

Content and Rigor: 1/7

K–8

Wyoming’s civics benchmarks offer scant and, at times, confusing direction to teachers and other stakeholders. For example, by the end of grade 5, students should have studied “the basic rights and responsibilities of citizenship” (SS5.1.1) and “the basic local, tribal, state, and national political processes (e.g., campaigning and voting)” (SS5.1.2). Yet no further detail is provided. And benchmarks on the U.S. legal system, the three branches of government, and other topics are similarly vague. For example, benchmark SS5.1.3 concerns “the basic origins of the United States Constitution (e.g., Declaration of Independence).” Because “basic origins” could plausibly include everything from Athens to the Articles of Confederation, the scope of this benchmark is unclear (and, in any event, the Constitution and Declaration deserve their own discrete benchmarks).

The standards for grades 6–8 provide similarly broad and ambiguous coverage of the development of the U.S. Constitution, the difference between civil and criminal systems, the structures of the United States and Wyoming Constitutions, the relationship between the United States and tribal governments, and the rights, duties, and responsibilities of a United States citizen. For example, one particularly unhelpful standard (SS8.1.6) notes that students should “understand the basic structures of various political systems (e.g., tribal, local, national, and world).” And some key terms like “rule of law” and “checks and balances” are nowhere to be found (even name checking these concepts would be a significant step forward, though ideally they would receive more nuanced coverage).

Finally, there are some noticeable disconnects between the benchmarks and the performance-level descriptors. For example, the K–2 strand has five benchmarks covering rules,

patriotic symbols, national holidays, and how Wyoming’s indigenous tribes honor people and celebrate events and provides a statement that the rules of the United States are called laws. Yet one of the performance-level descriptors asks students to demonstrate knowledge of good citizenship in their schools and communities (a topic not explicitly covered in any of those benchmarks).

High School

Disappointingly, the high school standards repeat several of the middle school benchmarks almost verbatim. For example, a high school student *analyzes* the development of the Constitution (SS12.1.3), whereas a middle school student merely *explains* it (SS8.1.3). Similarly, a high school student *distinguishes* between civil and criminal legal systems (SS12.1.4), while a middle school student must only *understand* the difference (SS8.1.4) (and equally repetitious benchmarks on rights and responsibilities, participation in the political process, and the structures of the U.S. and Wyoming Constitutions are no clearer than their middle school forebearers). Absent further explanation, these small changes in word choice don’t meaningfully ramp up the learning expectations for the high school level.

Notably absent from the high school benchmarks is any specific mention of the Bill of Rights or subsequent amendments, although there is talk of “rights” and “freedoms.” Similarly, crucial topics such as voting rights, foreign policy, federalism, and political parties (though perhaps implicit in words like “participation” and “structures”) should really have their own discrete, explicit, and nuanced benchmarks at the high school level.

The most detailed high school benchmarks are those on tribal government. For example, one standard expects students to “analyze the historical development of governance of the Indigenous Tribes of Wyoming through U.S. Congressional Acts and U.S. Supreme Court decisions (e.g., Per Capita Act, Marshall Trilogy, and *U.S. v. Shoshone Tribe of Indians*)” (SS12.1.3a). Yet the specificity of these standards only throws the vagueness that surrounds them into starker relief.

Skills and Dispositions

Most skills development is found in the technology, literacy, and global connections content standards, which include benchmarks for evaluating and synthesizing information

from multiple sources, assessing the validity of information, and supporting writing with accurate, sufficient, and relevant information. However, since there are only four brief benchmarks per grade band for this standard, explicit skills development is very limited.

Similarly, Wyoming makes little effort to foster essential civic dispositions, although there are references to political participation and the standard on “culture and cultural diversity” may enhance respect for others.

Clarity and Organization: 1/3

As noted, the performance-level indicators are quite repetitive as they march through the various levels of proficiency for each band, making the substance of the progressions difficult to ascertain. Furthermore, because of the broad, vague language Wyoming employs in its benchmarks, there is almost no sense of scope, and it’s impossible to say how content is meant to be sequenced. Finally, although the manner in which the standards are presented makes the “progression” across the bands easy to track, it would be nice to see the benchmarks for a single band all together (rather than scattered across dozens of pages).

Strengths & Weaknesses of the Wyoming Civics Standards

Strengths

1. The benchmarks on tribal government are reasonably clear and specific.

Weaknesses

1. Most essential content is missing.
2. Many benchmarks suffer from a fatal lack of detail.
3. Benchmarks for lower grade bands are repeated almost verbatim in higher bands.
4. Performance-level descriptors don’t always align with benchmarks.

U.S. History: F

In Brief

Although Wyoming’s current standards are marginally stronger than past versions, they still provide far too little guidance for districts and educators tasked with teaching U.S. History.

Content and Rigor: 1/7

K-8

Of the six social studies content standards, the one that comes closest to “history” is “time, continuity, and change,” which calls for students to analyze “events, people, problems, and ideas within their historical contexts.” However, even this strand consists mostly of broad concepts rather than specific historical content, and the few specifics in the vaguely worded “benchmarks” at the end of each grade band are underwhelming.

Students in grades K-2 are supposed to identify “how an event could change the future” and “tools and technologies that make life easier,” as well as be able to describe a “current event.” General examples are then given in parentheses (e.g., moving to a new town, washing machines, and “usage of the bison”). There is clearly a lack a guidance in this section.

The same format is used to provide students in grades 3-5 with specific but scattered examples. For instance, students are expected to describe “how small changes can lead to big changes,” and the few examples include the introduction of horses to the Plains tribes, the discovery of gold and minerals in the region, and the impact of the Homestead Act and Dawes Act. Similarly, examples of how one tool or technology evolves into another include the telegraph, telephone, and cell phone. A few limited examples are also provided when one standard asks students to identify differences between primary and secondary sources relative to historical events (“e.g., creation of reservations, Sand Creek Massacre, and creation of national parks”) (SS5.4.5). However, as in the previous band, it’s hard to say what teachers are supposed to do with this limited material.

The 6–8 grade band is slightly better but still doesn't provide enough guidance for teachers and students. To wit, the following are provided as examples of how historical events impact the future and how change spreads to other places: the spread of the Industrial Revolution, the causes of the Civil War, the impacts of Manifest Destiny, the aftermath of the French and Indian War, and the Indian Removal Act. Similarly, when requiring students to identify how federal policies have impacted indigenous tribes, the standards cite reservations, boarding schools, and forced assimilation. Yet despite these wisps of content, the lack of explanatory text or coherent chronology renders this section almost useless.

High School

The 9–12 grade band takes the same approach to defining expectations as the others. The only standards that provide specific content are those dealing with indigenous tribes. For example, the following events are mentioned by name: the Great Sioux War, Battle of Little Bighorn, Dawes Act, and 1956 Indian Relocation Act. As in other grade bands, it's not clear what teachers or students are supposed to do with the handful of specifics provided in this band.

In addition to “time, continuity, and change,” some other strands contain a smattering of U.S. History content. For example, Standard 1, which focuses on civics and government, mentions the state and the national constitutions, the Declaration of Independence, American institutions and ideals, holidays, and symbols that honor patriotism in the U.S. Similarly, Standard 2, which deals with culture and diversity, briefly mentions the withholding of Native American U.S. citizenship until 1924 and significant individuals in Wyoming and the U.S. (e.g., Martin Luther King, Jr., Helen Keller, and Sacagawea). Finally, Standard 5, which focuses on geography, mentions the Union Pacific Railroad, Yellowstone, and the Oregon Trail—all content that might be covered in a U.S. History course.

Beyond the few items identified above, there is no mention of any specific historical events, figures, ideas, or principles associated with United States history, let alone any attempt at chronological structure or explanation.

Skills Development

Various skills related to history are mentioned in the content standards but not in a cohesive format that would facilitate

understanding of what students should be able to do, nor is it clear if or how these skills progress from one grade band to the next.

Toward the end of the document, a glossary provides straightforward definitions of cause and effect, continuity and change, and primary and secondary sources, among other skills-related terms that are frequently used in history courses.

Clarity and Organization: 1/3

Wyoming's U.S. History standards are badly written and organizationally challenged. An overreliance on educational jargon makes it almost impossible to understand what is expected of students. The absence of any discernible scope or sequence renders it almost incoherent. Finally, no distinction is made between U.S. History and other social studies subjects, including World History. And no specific content is required for any individual grade level.

Teachers, parents, and students will not find sufficient guidance in this document.

Strengths & Weaknesses of the Wyoming U.S. History Standards

Strengths

1. Content on Wyoming's indigenous tribes is clearly presented.

Weaknesses

1. Most essential content is missing.
2. No U.S. History sequence is defined.
3. There is no discernible chronological structure.
4. There are no standards for standalone high school courses, such as U.S. History.

Recommendations

Civics

1. **Re-draft all civics benchmarks** to include missing topics (foreign policy, political parties, etc.) and provide greater detail, depth, and sophistication.

U.S. History

1. **Add specific content and commonly used eras in U.S. History to all grade spans.**
2. **Specify a recommended U.S. History sequence.**

Both Subjects

1. **Reorganize the high school standards**, so they address the specific courses that Wyoming students are likely to take.
2. **Make sure that benchmarks and performance-level descriptors align.**
3. **Specifically require that high school students take at least one year of U.S. History and at least one semester of Civics.**

Documents Reviewed

- “Wyoming Social Studies Content and Performance Standards,” 2018, https://edu.wyoming.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Social-Studies-Standards-20142018-additions_FINAL.pdf

Appendix

Reviewer Bios

Jeremy A. Stern, Ph.D. is an independent historian, history education consultant, and writer. He earned a Ph.D. from Princeton University and he publishes and speaks on both historical and educational topics. Dr. Stern was the lead reviewer for the Fordham Institute’s *The State of State U.S. History Standards 2011*, and has produced and consulted on history content for other educational organizations including The College Board, Great Minds, The Southern Poverty Law Center, International Baccalaureate, and The Core Knowledge Foundation. He has also consulted on standards and standards revisions for several state governments and state officials.

Alison E. Brody is a former litigation attorney and longtime civic educator in Portland, Oregon. She has served on the boards of various civil rights and higher education organizations at the state and national levels. Since 1999, she has coached the Lincoln High School Constitution Team. Her students have won three national championships in the We the People competition. She also works with the Classroom Law Project to teach K–12 students about the criminal justice system. Alison received a B.A. in history from Yale College, a M.St. in history from the University of Oxford, and a J.D. from the University of Washington School of Law.

José A. Gregory obtained his B.A. from Yale College in 1998 and then attended the University of Pennsylvania for graduate school. He has worked as an AP U.S. History teacher for 18 years, attended the AP Reading since 2008, and served in a leadership position since 2017. As a College Board endorsed consultant, Mr. Gregory facilitates various workshops and AP Summer Institutes around the country. Mr. Gregory currently teaches at Marist School in Atlanta and previously taught at a magnet school for the performing arts, DeKalb School of the Arts, and at Miami-Palmetto Senior High School in Florida. In the classroom, he strives to provide students with a comprehensive understanding of our nation’s narrative by focusing on historical content and thinking skills while exposing students to various perspectives.

Stephen Griffith is a graduate of Harvard College, the University of Oxford and Stanford Law School. He practiced law for 37 years with the Stoel Rives law firm in Portland, Oregon, where he was a general trial lawyer and adviser to high schools, colleges and universities. He has taught history, government and economics for 25 years at the high school, college and graduate school levels in the United States and abroad. Steve is one of the coaches of the Lincoln High School Constitution team in Portland, which has won the national “We the People” competition three times in the last 10 years, and the principal author of the City Club of Portland’s study on high school civics education.

Jonathan Pulvers is an educator and educational consultant. After working on local, state, and national campaigns, Jonathan decided to change tracks and devote himself to civic education. He has spent time in and out of the classroom in varied and diverse school districts catalyzing student involvement in civic life. He has coached three “We the People” national champion teams, mentored students in numerous local civic organizations, and taught civics and government in the classroom. Jonathan lives in Portland, Oregon with his wife, two children, and cat.

Review Criteria

Methods

This study examines state academic standards for civics and U.S. History with an eye toward determining how rigorously and completely they address these closely related subjects. Like previous Fordham Institute reviews of state standards, it focuses solely on the quality of the standards (and, where appropriate, closely related materials such as “curriculum frameworks” that include content guidance not present in the standards). It does not consider whether the standards are linked to a robust accountability system or are actually being implemented.

Starting in fall 2019, Fordham staff examined state education department websites to ensure that we had the latest information on each state’s civics and U.S. History standards and were aware of any other state-mandated material that should be included in our review.¹⁴ Once this process was completed, our content experts began rating states’ standards based on a predetermined grading scale and two sets of subject-specific criteria (more on both below), which were developed in consultation with our external advisers (see *Author Bios*).

For the sake of clarity and comparability, we used the same grading scale for civics and U.S. History. To determine grades for each state and subject, reviewers first assigned two scores: one for “content and rigor” and another for “organization and clarity.” Per the grading metric that follows, content and rigor were scored on a scale of 0–7 points, while organization and clarity were scored on a scale of 0–3 points. For each state and subject, these two scores were then added, and the total was translated into a letter grade, as follows:

Grade Points

A = 9 or 10 | **B = 7 or 8** | **C = 7 or 8** | **D = 3 or 4** | **F = 0, 1 or 2**

If a state had a total score of 4, 6, 8, or 10, reviewers had the discretion to add a + symbol to its letter grade. If a state scored a 3, 5, 7, or 9, reviewers had the discretion to add a – symbol to its letter grade.

14. Because several states revised their standards between 2019 and 2021, we also monitored those efforts to the best of our ability and revised our reviews to reflect these changes.

Grading Metric

Content and Rigor

Unless otherwise stated, the expectations associated with “content and rigor” are identical for the two subjects.

Seven points: Standards meet all the following criteria

The standards emphasize substantive and subject-appropriate content and are excellent in terms of the knowledge, skills, and dispositions chosen (as outlined in the subject-specific criteria that follows). The standards distinguish between more and less important knowledge and skills, either explicitly (i.e., by articulating which are more or less important) or implicitly (e.g., via the number of standards dedicated to particular topics), without overemphasizing topics of little importance or underemphasizing those of great importance. The standards strike an effective balance between content breadth and depth within and across grade levels. Collectively, they define a core literacy for all students in the subject under review.

- The standards exhibit a level of rigor that is appropriate for the targeted grade level(s), with students expected to learn content and skills in a sensible order and at an appropriately increasing level of difficulty. Essential content is covered at a basic level in the elementary and middle grades and in satisfactory depth at the high school level. The standards that run through twelfth grade are challenging enough to ensure that students who achieve proficiency by the final year of high school will be ready for postsecondary learning and informed citizenship.
- The standards are free of overt political or ideological bias and avoid other problems identified by reviewers such as those listed below. Although the standards need not be perfect, any defects are marginal.

Additional Civics-Specific Criteria

- The civics standards strike an appropriate balance between historical significance and present-day relevance and between the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that enable informed civic participation and agency. The standards communicate that civil discourse depends on a shared body of information and that, though all perspectives deserve to be aired without hindrance, sound governance depends on careful weighing of evidence and consideration of diverse interests.

Additional U.S. History-Specific Criteria

- The U.S. History standards focus on what happened and why and do not sacrifice historical context to present-day relevance, ahistorical moral judgment, or an excessive emphasis on students’ personal perspective. The standards communicate that interpretations depend on supporting evidence in historical context and that all interpretations are therefore not equally valid.

Six points: Standards fall short in one or more of the following ways

- A small but noticeable amount of essential content is missing.
- Some essential content isn’t covered well (e.g., essential content is listed but receives too little explanation or includes occasional inaccuracies).
- Significant space is devoted to nonessential knowledge and/or skills.

- The standards don't clearly distinguish between more and less important knowledge and/or skills.
- The standards sometimes overemphasize topics of little importance or underemphasize topics of great importance.
- Standards for particular grade levels aren't quite as rigorous as they should be or are a bit too rigorous (i.e., expectations are slightly too low or too high).
- Crucial content that should be introduced in elementary or middle school isn't covered until high school (e.g., the Civil War) or is introduced in elementary or middle school but not revisited in sufficient depth at the high school level.
- There are other minor problems or shortcomings (e.g., the standards fall somewhat short of the subject-specific aims listed in the fourth or fifth bullet points of the section on score seven).

Five points: Standards fall short in one or more of the following ways

- A significant amount of essential content is missing.
- Some essential content is covered in an unsatisfactory manner (e.g., coverage lacks proper depth, has troublesome gaps, or contains inaccuracies).
- Substantial space is devoted to nonessential knowledge and/or skills.
- The standards do little to distinguish between more and less important knowledge and/or skills (i.e., importance is not articulated or conveyed in an effective way).
- The standards often overemphasize topics of little importance or underemphasize topics of great importance.
- Standards for some grade levels aren't as rigorous as they should be or are clearly too rigorous (i.e., expectations are too low or too high).
- There are other important shortcomings (e.g., the standards fall significantly short of the subject-specific aims listed in the fourth or fifth bullet points of the section on score seven).

Four points: Standards fall short in one or more of the following ways

- A substantial amount of essential content is missing.
- Most of the essential content is covered in an unsatisfactory manner (i.e., coverage lacks depth, contains problematic gaps, or contains multiple inaccuracies).
- Up to half of the standards are devoted to nonessential knowledge and/or skills.
- The standards don't distinguish between more and less important knowledge and/or skills.
- The content often fails to provide the level of rigor appropriate for the designated grade level(s).
- There are numerous problems or shortcomings, even if there are no serious errors.

Three points: Standards fall short in one or more of the following ways

- As much as half of the essential content is missing.
- Nearly all the essential content is covered in an unsatisfactory manner.
- More than half the standards are devoted to nonessential knowledge and/or skills.
- The content consistently fails to provide the level of rigor appropriate for the designated grade level(s).
- There are serious problems, shortcomings, and/or errors in the standards.

Two points: Standards fall short in one or more of the following ways

- More than half of the essential content is missing.
- Essential content is covered in a wholly unsatisfactory manner.
- The content consistently fails to approach the level of rigor appropriate for the designated grade level(s).
- There are numerous serious problems, shortcomings, or errors (as listed above).

One point: Standards fall short in one or more of the following ways

- Most of the essential content is missing or inaccurate.
- Essential content is covered in a wholly unsatisfactory manner and seriously lacking in rigor.
- There are numerous extremely serious problems, shortcomings, or errors (as listed above).

Zero points: Standards fall short in one or more of the following ways

- Essentially all the essential content is missing or inaccurate.
- Such content as appears is full of critical problems, shortcomings, and errors (as listed above).

Organization and Clarity

The expectations associated with “organization and clarity” are identical for the two subjects.

Three points: Standards meet all the following criteria

- The standards are well organized, clearly presented, and suitable for reference and use by education practitioners, curriculum and assessment developers, and others who should be expected to rely on them for guidance and direction regarding the state’s expectations for student learning.

- The scope and sequence of the material are readily apparent and sensible, providing solid guidance to users when it comes to the content and skills the state expects students to learn as they progress through K–12 schooling. Sufficient detail is provided.
- The documents are written in prose that the general public (e.g., parents, voters, and taxpayers) can understand and are mostly free from jargon. Where possible, they describe things that are measurable (i.e., can lead to observable, comparable results across students and schools).

Two points: Standards fall short in one or more of the following ways

- There are mild organizational challenges.
- The scope and sequence of the material are not completely apparent or sensible.
- There is insufficient detail.
- There is some jargon and/or vague or unclear language.
- Too many standards describe things that are not measurable.

One point: Standards fall short in one or more of the following ways

- There are substantial organizational challenges.
- The scope and sequence of the material are difficult to parse or defend.
- The standards are sorely lacking in detail.
- Many standards are vague or unclear.

Zero points: Standards fall short in one or more of the following ways

- The standards are disorganized or incoherent.
- Scope and sequence is a mystery.
- The standards are badly written.

Criteria for Civics

The outline that follows is offered as a basic checklist of content areas and topics that reviewers expect to find covered in high-quality K–12 civics standards. This skeleton list is not offered as a guide to the sufficient teaching and learning of civics. Reviewers expect that high-quality standards will expand upon and explicate the broad themes delineated here. Reviewers also expect that basic themes will be introduced during elementary and middle grades but that all key content areas will be introduced or revisited in greater depth at the high school level.

Essential Content

The goal of civic education is to equip students with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that will enable them to be productive members of the communities to which they belong. These communities range from local to state to national to global and may involve both government and civil society. Knowledge of the institutions and forces that shape these communities is essential but insufficient. It must be coupled with skills and dispositions—including a commitment to constitutional democracy and such core American values as freedom, justice, and equality—that will equip and motivate tomorrow’s adults to protect and improve their many communities.

Essential Knowledge

At a minimum, strong civics standards expect students to know or understand the following things:

- **Rule of law**—Students should understand that the rule of law is a condition of liberty. They should understand that laws should be clear, public, prospective, equally applicable to everyone, and consistently enforced. They should know that the Constitution has the status of higher law in the United States, limiting every public official in the land.
- **Separation of powers**—Students should understand how the federal legislative, executive, and judicial branches are designed to guard against the excessive accumulation of power through a system of “checks and balances” (and how this approach is echoed in state governments). They should be able to explain how alternative institutional arrangements have historically succeeded or failed to achieve that purpose.
- **The legislative branch**—Students should understand the structure and basic functions of Congress and their own state’s legislature, as well as the process through which laws are made. They should understand the difference between plenary and limited legislative powers, the doctrine of implied powers, the reach of the Commerce Clause, and the power of Congress to (among other things) levy taxes, declare war, establish a uniform rule of naturalization, and confirm and remove officials in the other two branches of government.
- **The executive branch**—Students should be able to identify the core functions of the federal executive branch, including but not limited to the president’s role in setting foreign policy and commanding the armed forces, the appointment and pardon powers, the duty to faithfully execute the laws, the basic contours of administrative agencies, and the concept of the “bully pulpit.” Students should also understand the key powers and functions of their own state’s executive branch and its local-government equivalent.
- **The judicial branch**—Students should understand the power of the courts to interpret law and how judicial review can secure rights and rein in legislative and executive power. They should know how federal judges are nominated and confirmed, how their own state’s judges assume (and retain) office, and the pros and cons of lifetime appointment. Finally, they should understand the distinction between civil and criminal law, know how lawsuits begin, and have a basic sense of how trials proceed and appeals are decided.
- **Federalism, state government, and local government**—Students should understand how power and responsibility are divided between state and federal governments under the U.S. Constitution, how states delegate authority to local governments, and how the different levels of government can work in unison or come into conflict. They should know the basic structure of their state, local, and (where applicable) tribal governments, the major functions and services they provide to citizens, ways they are funded, and mechanisms by which they are changed.

- **Comparative government**—Students should understand that countries may have different forms of government and should be able to distinguish between constitutional democracies and autocratic or authoritarian systems, as well as between direct and representative democracies, presidential and parliamentary systems, unicameral and bicameral legislatures, and unitary, federal, and confederate systems. They should know the difference between “first-past-the-post” voting systems and those that ensure proportional representation or majority election by runoff.
- **Civil liberties**—Students should understand how the religious, expressive, and other rights in the Bill of Rights have protected liberty and enhanced democracy and how the implied rights of privacy and autonomy have become more salient as technology has expanded the reach of government. They should understand that rights frequently collide with one another or with aspects of the public interest and therefore are rarely absolute.
- **Due process**—Students should know that fair rulings require notice and an opportunity to be heard and that the criminally accused are presumed innocent until proven guilty, are entitled to a jury of their peers and the assistance of counsel, and have the right to a speedy and public trial by an impartial trier of fact, during which they have the right to present evidence, call witnesses, and confront opposing witnesses.
- **Equal protection**—Students should know how and why the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth amendments to the U.S. Constitution represented “a new birth of freedom,” how the equal protection principle requires the government to justify any distinction it draws in laws, and how the voting rights amendments have expanded democracy. They should also understand how states subverted equal protection during the Jim Crow era and how the federal judiciary first conceded to and then pushed back against the limitation of voting rights.
- **Elections and politics**—Students should know the terms of office for members of the federal executive and legislative branches (and their state government equivalents). They should be able to explain what a political party is, what primary and general elections are, and how the Electoral College operates. Finally, they should understand the role that media, money, interest groups, redistricting, and voter access policies can play in determining elections, as well as which policies are adopted.
- **Civil society and the role of government**—Students should know how people in their various communities voluntarily come together to solve common problems and promote shared goals. They should also have a basic sense of how government size and mission have changed over time, how governments in the U.S. currently spend the money they collect in taxes, and how liberals and conservatives have traditionally viewed the trade-offs associated with public spending and regulation.
- **Responsibilities of citizens**—Students should understand how they can support their communities by voting, respecting other persons, paying their taxes, obeying the law, and applying it as a juror. They should also understand how they can make a difference in their communities by volunteering, engaging in First Amendment activities, and joining or forming community organizations.

Essential Skills

Strong civics standards ask teachers to develop at least three key skills in every student:

- **Critical thinking**—When engaging with current events or issues, students should be able to distinguish between facts and values, correlation and causation, intended and unintended effects, personal and public interest, and reliable and suspect sources of information. They should understand and seek to overcome biases such as confirmation bias and attention bias.

- **Problem analysis**—Based on their knowledge of American government and history, students should be able to research and analyze the reasons for a current social or political problem, the costs and benefits of potential solutions to it, and possible means of addressing it, such as advocacy, organization, publicity, money, elections, and legislation.
- **Advocacy**—Students should practice the art of persuasion in various formats and contexts, backing their opinions with evidence, responding thoughtfully to the opinions of others, and revising their own opinions when appropriate.

Essential Dispositions

Strong civics standards encourage educators to cultivate three dispositions in their students:

1. **Respect for other people and opinions**—Students should respect other persons regardless of their background (e.g., age, race, gender, religion, nationality, sexual orientation, etc.) and engage civilly with opinions that differ from their own.
2. **Inclination to learn, participate, and serve**—Students should be motivated to educate themselves on major social and political issues, to make a difference in those that are important to them, and to advance the welfare of others and of their communities.
3. **Commitment to American institutions and ideals**—Students should be personally committed to the preservation of constitutional democracy and the realization of freedom, justice, and equality—recognizing that these ideals mean different things to different people and are sometimes in tension with one another.

Sequence

The following criteria provide examples of the essential knowledge and skills that rigorous civics standards might expect all students to learn in elementary, middle, and high school, respectively. They are meant to be illustrative, not prescriptive or comprehensive. Civic dispositions are best learned in context, starting on the first day of school, and are no less important for not being itemized below.

By the end of elementary school, strong civics standards might expect the following of students:

- Know the different roles of local, state, and national governments
- Know the three branches of government and their basic functions
- Know the concepts of “separation of powers” and “checks and balances” and the reasons for them
- Know why we have laws, how an idea becomes a law, and how laws are enforced
- Know how people can exercise their rights of religious practice, speech, press, assembly, and petition
- Know how people contribute to their communities by voting, volunteering, and paying taxes
- Understand the difference between fact and opinion, how to use research to uncover facts, and the importance of evidence when offering opinions
- Analyze a problem within the classroom or school, develop a plan for fixing it, execute the plan, and discuss the results
- Debate the merits of two or more candidates who are running for office

By the end of middle school, strong civics standards might expect the following of students:

- Know the principles of rule of law and be able to apply them to events in their communities (e.g., inconsistent or biased enforcement of traffic violations and vague campus rules on speech)
- Know how the U.S. Constitution grants powers and responsibilities to the federal government and guards against their abuse through the separation of powers and “checks and balances” (e.g., when the president vetoes legislation or the Supreme Court declares a law unconstitutional)
- Know how Congress and federal courts have responded to and caused changes in society through legislation and decisions (e.g., the Social Security Act of 1935 and *Brown v. Board of Education*)
- Know the reason for the Bill of Rights and be able to explain the protections of the First, Fourth, and Sixth Amendments, including the basic structure of a trial
- Know the evolution of voting rights in the United States (e.g., Voting Rights Act of 1965 and the Fifteenth, Nineteenth, and Twenty-Sixth Amendments)
- Know the major political parties, the roles they play in choosing candidates and guiding voters, and the principal differences in their positions
- Know how people become involved in government in ways other than voting (e.g., by lobbying, petitioning, running for office, serving on juries, obtaining information, challenging government action, and working in the military or civil service)
- Know their local and state governments in the manner described in the “knowledge” section
- Study the information about a public figure that is available online, organize it into positive and negative claims, and find evidence that informs discussion of which statements are true and which are false
- Research an important public issue as a team (e.g., single-payer healthcare and banning assault weapons), write a prepared statement taking one side, and debate the merits with a team that takes the other side
- Understand what confirmation bias is and identify instances in which it may have affected their own views and/or the views of others

By the end of high school, strong civics standards might expect the following of students:

- Know how the powers of the federal legislative, executive, and judicial branches have evolved since 1788 (e.g., the establishment of judicial review in *Marbury versus Madison* and how Congress has delegated authority to the executive branch through the creation of agencies)
- Know the areas of exclusive and concurrent state and federal power and responsibility, the role of the Supremacy Clause in resolving conflicts, the power of the Federal Government to impose conditions on state grant recipients, and the role of states as “laboratories of democracy”
- Know how the Federal Government can affect the economy through its tax, spending, regulatory, monetary, and trade policies
- Know the role of the Fourteenth, Fifteenth, and Nineteenth Amendments in expanding liberty and equality and the issues associated with their implementation
- Know how party primary rules affect the choice of party nominees and how voting methods, redistricting, campaign finance laws, and the Electoral College can affect the outcome of elections

- Know the constitutional and statutory methods by which voting has been expanded and restricted over time (e.g., poll taxes, literacy tests, and voter ID laws)
- Know how the United States interacts with other nations (e.g., through trade, treaties, foreign aid, military intervention, humanitarian efforts, and membership in international organizations)
- Be able to identify the intended and unintended effects of a law (e.g., the Medicare Act of 1965 and the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001)
- Be able to debate the merits and demerits of a constitutional feature (e.g., the Electoral College and the state initiative system)
- Be able to read the news and understand its larger relevance to the institutions, processes, and trends of the American system of government (e.g., understanding the sources of Congressional gridlock and its implications for federal policy)

Criteria for U.S. History

The outline that follows is offered as a basic checklist of content areas and topics that reviewers expect to find covered in high-quality K–12 U.S. History standards. This skeleton list is not offered as a guide to the sufficient teaching and learning of U.S. History. Reviewers expect that high-quality standards will expand upon and explicate the broad themes delineated here. Reviewers also expect that basic themes will be introduced during elementary and middle grades and that all key content areas will be introduced or revisited in greater depth at the high school level.

Essential Content

The goal of U.S. History education is to equip students with a substantive understanding of their nation’s origins and development, the roots and emergence of American ideals of freedom and equality, and the nation’s ongoing struggles to make those ideals real for all Americans. Students should understand America’s successes and failures in living up to its founding principles, viewing past events in the context of their times, as many fought to expand the definition of citizenship and inclusion to an ever-wider circle of Americans. Substantive historical knowledge must be coupled with skills that allow students to analyze and evaluate historical evidence, construct coherent and informed historical arguments, and assess the validity of others’ arguments in historical and factual context.

Essential Knowledge

- **c. 20,000 years ago–1500 CE:** The first peoples of North America (including the arrival, establishment, and regional diversity of Native North Americans) and their lifeways and religions
- **1491–1600s:** European colonization of North America (including Europe’s first encounters with the Americas; Spanish, French, British, and Dutch colonization; European imperial rivalries in North America; and European contact with Native Americans and its consequences)
- **1607–1763:** The British North American colonies (including British colonial regions and regional cultures; religious tensions and tolerance; the rise of representative government and popular power; the slave trade and the rise, entrenchment, and

regional patterns of slavery; increasing displacement of Native Americans; North America's imperial wars; and Britain's demand for revenue from its colonies)

- **1763–1800:** Revolution and Republic (including direct taxation by Parliament and growing American rejection of Parliamentary power without representation; Americans' fight for their vision of freedom and Britain's for its empire in the Revolutionary War; the roles of women, free African Americans, and Native Americans in Revolutionary America and early calls for expanded rights; the creation of American Constitutionalism; Federalism and anti-Federalism; the new Republic in operation; and the emergence of political parties)
- **1800–1840s:** Growth and reform (including commercial, industrial, and territorial expansion; increasing confrontation with European powers and insistence on U.S. power in the Americas; mounting violence against and forced migration of Native Americans; the expansion of democracy for white men; rising demands for rights from women and Black Americans; the abolition of slavery in the North and its expansion in the South and West; increased immigration and nativist backlash; development of an American national culture; religious revivalism; and movements for moral reform of society)
- **1840s–1877:** Civil War and Reconstruction (including Northern abolitionism and free-soil antislavery; rising conflict over slavery's expansion to the new territories and the states formed from those territories; the secession crisis; Civil War over union and democracy; the emerging war over slavery and America's meaning; the Emancipation Proclamation; Reconstruction and attempts to establish racial equality under the Constitution and law; the abandonment of Reconstruction; and the subversion of legal equality)
- **1877–1917:** Industry, immigration, and a global role (including the second Industrial Revolution; the surge in European and Asian immigration and domestic resistance to large-scale immigration; growing urbanization, rural economic strains, and the rise of Populist politics; westward expansion and its consequences for settlers and Native Americans; Gilded Age prosperity, inequality, and the push for labor rights; the post-Reconstruction New South and the rise of Jim Crow; the Progressive Era and its push for reform; the rising movements for civil rights and women's suffrage; and growing U.S. intervention and imperial presence abroad)
- **1917–1945:** Global crises and the world wars (including patriotism and repression at home as the U.S. joins WWI; the prosperity bubble of the 1920s; the Nineteenth Amendment; new immigration restrictions; new technologies and the creation of mass media; economic crash and global Depression; the New Deal response and the expansion of the governmental/presidential role in American life; totalitarianism in Europe and Asia; U.S. alarm and isolationism; mobilization of military and domestic population for war; and WWII, the battle against global tyrannies, the United Nations, and U.S. global power)
- **1945–1980:** The Cold War and pressures for change at home (including growing tension between the communist East and the Western democracies; East-West competition for and conflict over nonaligned nations; U.S. resistance to the communist threat and the new Red Scare; rising postwar prosperity and new technologies; the exploration of space; the Civil Rights and Women's movements and the battle for full racial and gender equality; the Great Society and expansion of the welfare state; Vietnam, domestic unrest, and the "counterculture"; and political scandal, economic stagnation, and alienation)
- **1980–present:** The modern period (including the rise of the New Right and the call for smaller government; military expansion and the end of the Cold War; instability, terrorism, and the challenge to U.S. power in the post-Cold War world; transformational new technologies in medicine, communications, and computing; global environmental strains fueling political crises and mass migration; contentious shifts in social attitudes, rapidly changing U.S. demographics, immigration, and growing tensions over America's national identity; and increasing political polarization and dueling visions for America's future)

Essential Skills

- **Evaluation:** Students should be able to identify, obtain, and evaluate historical information and evidence, including primary sources and historically relevant data
- **Interpretation:** Students should be able to make informed judgments about the soundness of historical claims and the likely importance of factors that may have contributed to a historical event, trend, or outcome, citing specific evidence
- **Argumentation:** Students should be able to produce convincing explanations, interpretations, or arguments regarding historical events or outcomes, while acknowledging the limitations of the available evidence and the potential for alternative interpretations

Essential Dispositions

- **Respectful appreciation:** Students should recognize the contributions of previous generations and the sacrifices that political and social progress have required
- **Historical perspective:** Students should see current events through the lens of history, looking to the past for lessons that apply to the present without subjecting it to anachronistic present-day perspectives
- **Eternal vigilance:** Students should see America's democratic traditions and institutions as a hard-won inheritance that should never be taken for granted

Sequence

The following criteria provide examples of the kinds of essential knowledge and skills that rigorous U.S. History standards might expect all students to have learned by the end of elementary school, middle school, and high school, respectively. They are meant to be illustrative, not prescriptive or comprehensive.

By the end of elementary school, strong U.S. History standards might expect the following of students:

- Identify important presidents (e.g., George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Ronald Reagan, and Barack Obama), as well as other key individuals (e.g., Benjamin Franklin, Frederick Douglass, Susan B. Anthony, and Martin Luther King, Jr.)
- Demonstrate a basic familiarity with core historical events and developments (e.g., European contact with Native Americans, the parallel rise of self-government and slavery in the British colonies, the American Revolution, the Civil War and Reconstruction, the two world wars, the Cold War, and the Civil Rights and Women's movements)
- Know the roles played by key individuals associated with major events (e.g., Washington's, Jefferson's, and Madison's roles in American independence, the American Revolution, and the Constitution; Lincoln's, Grant's, and Lee's roles in the Civil War; FDR and the New Deal; and the contributions of Civil Rights leaders).
- Demonstrate a clear sense of chronology (e.g., know that the American Revolution took place in the late eighteenth century, the Civil War in the mid-nineteenth century, the two world wars and the Great Depression in the first half of the twentieth century, and the Cold War and Civil Rights movement in the latter twentieth century)

- Read and understand seminal primary sources (e.g., the Declaration of Independence, the Gettysburg Address, and the “I Have a Dream” speech) and be able to explain their historical and present-day significance
- Identify sources most used by historians (e.g., letters, diaries, news accounts, official documents, and oral interviews)

By the end of middle school, strong U.S. History standards might expect the following of students:

- Recognize key changes in American ideas and institutions (e.g., growing resistance to slavery, gradual progress toward equal rights for women and minorities, and the expanding role of the presidency), as well as key continuities (e.g., the importance of the right to vote and the gradual assimilation of successive waves of immigrants)
- Identify and explain the enduring influence of various political, social, geographic, economic, and demographic events (e.g., the political and economic impact of the Marshall Court’s interpretation of the Constitution or how the Great Depression redefined the role of the federal government in the national economy)
- Show an understanding of historical causation (e.g., that Colonial-era ideas of self-government helped cause the American Revolution and that the Jim Crow system spurred the Civil Rights movement) and the ways in which multiple factors combine to produce a particular outcome
- Know the difference between primary and secondary sources (e.g., Madison’s notes on the 1787 Constitutional Convention versus a modern historian’s book about Madison’s role at the Convention)
- Distinguish between historical facts and historical interpretations (e.g., what measures Madison proposed at the Constitutional Convention vs. why he proposed them)

By the end of high school, strong U.S. History standards might expect the following of students:

- Show their understanding that historical argument must take conflicting evidence into account and that differing interpretations of historical questions are often matters of judgment, not simply matters of fact (e.g., liberal vs. conservative assessments of the New Deal or the causes of the Cold War)
- Recognize that historical interpretations often change as historians ask new questions of the past, new evidence is discovered, and new perspectives emerge (for example, interpretations of Cold War Soviet espionage in the U.S. changed substantially when former Soviet archives were opened in the 1990s)
- Demonstrate a sophisticated understanding of historical context—that is, how past events looked to and were evaluated by various groups of people at the time—and how Americans’ attitudes, values, and ideals have changed over time
- Make a coherent historical argument, based on a logical interpretation of primary and secondary sources, that takes conflicting evidence, alternative interpretations, and/or potential counterarguments into account
- Explain the meaning and significance of *e pluribus unum* in U.S. History and the embrace of and tensions generated by increasing diversity throughout the country’s history

Subject Overlap

A major challenge associated with reviewing civics and U.S. History standards is that the two subjects overlap with one another, as well as other social studies subdisciplines, in various and complex ways, making it difficult to say exactly what is or should be “civics” and/or “U.S. History.” For example, topics like the Constitutional Convention and the Voting Rights Act could conceivably appear in either a state’s civics standards or its U.S. History standards (or in both). Similarly, a standard on interstate commerce could conceivably appear in a state’s economics and/or geography strands rather than its civics and/or U.S. History strands.

Because there is more than one defensible way to handle such topics, our general policy for grades K–8 was to give states credit for covering a topic thoughtfully. However, because “U.S. History” and “Civics” (or “U.S. Government”) are typically taught in separate classes at the high school level (and because it is important that students be expected to view certain topics through a “civics” and/or a “U.S. History” lens), we held states to a higher standard when it came to the location of essential high school content.

Glossary

The following terms are defined as follows for the purposes of this report:

- **Content** refers to essential knowledge, skills, and dispositions (as defined below).
- **Knowledge** refers to those facts (e.g., names, dates, and events) and other information (e.g., concepts, problems, solutions, strategies, and issues) without which history and civics students cannot make full use of their skills and dispositions (see below) or truly understand the strengths and shortcomings of the remarkable land in which they live.
- **Skills** refers to the intellectual and operational capacities needed to acquire and apply knowledge of civics and/or U.S. History. In addition to the subject-specific skills outlined above, these include more general skills, such as the ability to recognize patterns, summarize, and synthesize.
- **Dispositions** refers to orientations or habits of mind that relate to democratic character formation—i.e., those public and private traits that are essential to the maintenance and improvement of a democratic society and a republican form of government.
- **Rigor** refers to the degree to which a state’s standards for every grade or level of schooling successfully articulate what is expected of students—knowledge, skills, and (where appropriate) dispositions—at levels of mastery sufficient to assure readiness for subsequent levels and (upon graduation) for college-level learning and/or informed citizenship.
- **Clarity** refers to the overall quality of the prose in a state’s standards documents and the degree to which it is appropriately specific, accessible to the general public (e.g., parents, voters, and taxpayers), and suitable for reference and use by education practitioners, curriculum and assessment developers, and other stakeholders.
- **Organization** refers to the way a state’s standards are structured. In general, the scope and sequence should be readily apparent, logical, and sensible, providing solid guidance to users when it comes to the content and skills that the state expects students to learn as they progress through K–12 schooling.