

# The State of State U.S. History Standards 2011

**By Sheldon M. Stern and Jeremy A. Stern**

Foreword by Chester E. Finn, Jr. and Kathleen Porter-Magee

FEBRUARY 2011





# CONTENTS



Executive Summary .....	2	Nevada .....	97
Foreword .....	3	New Hampshire.....	100
Introduction and National Findings .....	10	New Jersey.....	102
<b>U.S. HISTORY REVIEWS</b>			
National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) U.S. History Framework .....	17	New Mexico .....	105
Alabama .....	20	New York .....	108
Alaska .....	23	North Carolina .....	111
Arizona .....	25	North Dakota .....	114
Arkansas.....	27	Ohio .....	117
California.....	30	Oklahoma .....	120
Colorado.....	33	Oregon.....	123
Connecticut.....	35	Pennsylvania .....	126
Delaware .....	38	Rhode Island.....	131
District of Columbia.....	41	South Carolina .....	132
Florida .....	43	South Dakota .....	135
Georgia.....	46	Tennessee.....	138
Hawaii .....	48	Texas.....	141
Idaho .....	51	Utah.....	144
Illinois.....	54	Vermont .....	147
Indiana .....	57	Virginia.....	150
Iowa.....	60	Washington.....	153
Kansas .....	62	West Virginia.....	156
Kentucky.....	65	Wisconsin.....	159
Louisiana.....	68	Wyoming.....	162
Maine .....	71	<b>APPENDICES</b>	
Maryland .....	74	Appendix A: Methods, Grading, and Criteria .....	164
Massachusetts.....	77	Appendix B: Detailed State Grades, 2011 .....	169
Michigan .....	80	About the Authors.....	174
Minnesota .....	83		
Mississippi.....	86		
Missouri.....	89		
Montana.....	91		
Nebraska.....	94		

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study is the Thomas B. Fordham Institute’s first review of the quality of state U.S. history standards since 2003. Key findings include:

- A majority of states’ standards are mediocre-to-awful. The average grade across *all* states is barely a D. In twenty-eight jurisdictions—a majority of states—the history standards earn Ds or below. Eighteen earn Fs.
- Just one state—South Carolina—has standards strong enough to earn a straight A.
- Six other states—Alabama, California, Indiana, Massachusetts, New York, and the District of Columbia—earn A-minuses, and three more received grades in the B range. Still, this means just ten states—or about one in five—get honors marks.

The study also reviewed the framework for the National Assessment of Educational Progress’s (NAEP) U.S. history examination and found it deserving of an A-minus. Thus, there are several national models—from the strongest state standards to the NAEP—that lagging states could and should emulate going forward.

**TABLE ES-1 • 2011 GRADES FOR U.S. HISTORY STANDARDS**

*Ranked from best to worst*

State	2011 Grade				
South Carolina	A	Minnesota	C	Colorado	F
Alabama	A-	Nebraska	C	Connecticut	F
California	A-	New Jersey	C	Delaware	F
District of Columbia	A-	Tennessee	C	Idaho	F
Indiana	A-	Utah	C	Iowa	F
Massachusetts	A-	Virginia	C	Maine	F
NAEP	A-	Arkansas	D	Mississippi	F
New York	A-	Illinois	D	Missouri	F
Oklahoma	B+	Kentucky	D	Montana	F
Georgia	B	<b>National Average</b>	<b>D</b>	New Hampshire	F
Michigan	B	Nevada	D	North Carolina	F
Arizona	C	New Mexico	D	North Dakota	F
Florida	C	Ohio	D	Oregon	F
Hawaii	C	South Dakota	D	Pennsylvania	F
Kansas	C	Texas	D	Vermont	F
Louisiana	C	Washington	D	Wisconsin	F
Maryland	C	West Virginia	D	Wyoming	F
		Alaska	F	Rhode Island	N/A



# FOREWORD

» CHESTER E. FINN, JR. and KATHLEEN PORTER-MAGEE

“How unpardonable it would be for us,” the eminent historian David McCullough declared at Hillsdale College in 2005, “with all that we have been given, all the advantages we have, all the continuing opportunities we have to enhance and increase our love of learning—to turn out blockheads or to raise blockheads.”<sup>1</sup>

Unpardonable or not, we have mounting evidence that American education is doing just that—creating a generation of students who don’t understand or value our own nation’s history. Dunderheads if not truly blockheads, one might well conclude, at least in this domain.

On the 2006 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), for example, not even half of twelfth graders made it to NAEP’s *basic* level in U.S. history—and barely 13 percent were proficient. What does that really mean? Here’s one illustration: When asked to “identify a significant factor that led to United States involvement in the Korean War” and “explain why this factor was significant,” only one high school senior in seven was able to supply a satisfactory answer, such as America’s efforts to curb the spread of communism after World War II.

Though scores in 2006 were up a bit from earlier rounds, the overall results were still appalling. (NAEP tested U.S. history again in 2010; these scores will be made public in a few months.)

Why is this? What causes this alarming vacuum of basic historical knowledge? There are multiple explanations, of course, but the most significant is that few states and school systems take U.S. history seriously. So why should students?

Yes, every state requires students to study American history in some form—often in the traditional junior-year U.S. history course—and every state except Rhode Island has mandated at least rudimentary standards for this subject. Yet few hold their schools accountable for teaching the standards or their students accountable for learning the content. In fact, it appears that only thirteen states include any history or social studies as part of a high school exit exam and just eight assess (or will soon assess) social studies or history at *both* the elementary and high school levels.<sup>2</sup> This under-emphasis on history in K-12 is compounded by the fact that universities seldom require prowess in history as a condition of entrance and almost never make it a graduation requirement of their own.

Since learning history doesn’t really count, schools devote less and less instructional time to it. One analysis,<sup>3</sup> based on federal data, suggests that elementary schools spend a paltry 7.6 percent of their total instructional time on social studies, of which history is only one part—and often a distressingly small part.<sup>4</sup> The evidence

1 Bruce Cole, “The Danger of Historical Amnesia: A Conversation with David McCullough,” *Humanities*, 23 (2002).

2 These findings were derived from two sources: First, from the Center for Education Progress’s *State High School Tests: Exit Exams and Other Assessments*, which was published in December 2010. In addition, Fordham staff conducted a search of each state department of education’s assessment practices in December 2010.

3 Beth A. Morton and Ben Dalton, *Changes in Instructional Hours in Four Subjects by Public School Teachers* (Washington, D.C.: National Center for Education Statistics, May 2007) <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2007305>.

4 By contrast, English language arts (ELA) consume almost 36 percent of elementary school instructional time. Given the strong link between content knowledge and reading comprehension that has been found by scholars like E.D. Hirsch, the irony is that spending more time on subjects like history would likely do more for student reading achievement than continuing to add hours of ELA instruction to the day.

suggests that even this little slice is shrinking: The amount of instructional time devoted to social studies has been *decreasing* over the past two decades such that, by 2003-04, students were spending, on average, eighteen hours less in social studies classes each year than they did in 1987-88. That means—assuming typical class periods of 45-50 minutes a day—that students lost the equivalent of four weeks of social studies instruction and, even more alarmingly, we have no indication that that trend is reversing.<sup>5</sup>

**TABLE 1 • AVERAGE INSTRUCTIONAL TIME BY SUBJECT, FIRST THROUGH FOURTH GRADE (1987–88 THROUGH 2003–04)<sup>6</sup>**

	1987–88		1990–91		1993–94		1999–2000		2003–04	
	Average # of hours	% of student school week	Average # of hours	% of student school week	Average # of hours	% of student school week	Average # of hours	% of student school week	Average # of hours	% of student school week
English	11.0	35.0	10.5	32.9	10.9	34.0	10.9	33.6	11.6	35.5
Mathematics	4.9	15.4	4.9	15.3	5.3	16.4	5.7	17.4	5.4	16.5
Social studies	2.8	8.7	2.9	9.1	3.0	9.5	2.9	8.9	2.5	7.6
Science	2.6	8.1	2.7	8.4	3.0	9.2	2.6	8.1	2.3	7.1
Length of student school week	31.6	-	31.9	-	32.1	-	32.6	-	32.6	-

*Notes:* Data collected from the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), “Public Teacher Data File,” 1987–88, 1990–91, 1993–94, 1999–2000, and 2003–04; “Public School Data File,” 1987–88, 1990–91, 1993–94, 1999–2000, and 2003–04; “Charter Teacher Data File,” 1999–2000; and “Charter School Data File,” 1999–2000.

This raises the stakes on each remaining instructional hour that is devoted to social studies and history. Wringing every possible bit of learning from this time is critical if our children are to acquire the knowledge they need to become literate American citizens.

The first and most important step toward maximizing the educational yield from class time and ensuring that all students learn essential content is for states to set clear, rigorous, and specific standards. Such standards are the backbone to which curricula, assessments, teacher training, professional development, and even certification requirements are attached. We readily acknowledge that standards, in and of themselves, do not yield student achievement. We’ve ample evidence that standards, even good standards, absent proper implementation and accountability, do little more than adorn classroom bookshelves. Academic standards are simply the recipe with which the education system cooks; educators supply and mix the essential ingredients. But without clear, consistent standards, you can expect learning goals, curriculum, and instruction to vary wildly from district to district and school to school, and few students to graduate high school knowing all they should about their country’s past and thus its present.

## What We Found

Fordham has a long history of evaluating state history standards. In 1998 and again in 2000, Dr. David Saxe of Penn State University evaluated them for us. In 2003, we enlisted the help of historian Sheldon Stern, founder and former director of the American History Project for High School Students at the John F. Kennedy Library, to review state history standards with an eye toward how well they handled U.S. history.

Now it’s time for a fresh review. By 2010, forty-nine states and the District of Columbia—all but Rhode Island—had set standards for social studies that include—in some form—content expectations for U.S.

<sup>5</sup> Beth A. Morton and Ben Dalton, 3.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

history. Forty-five of those states had changed their standards since 2003. In this report, we evaluate today's standards to see how they measure up.

To conduct it, we again tapped Sheldon Stern's expertise. He partnered with Jeremy A. Stern, who recently earned his PhD in American history from Princeton University.

We approached this review a bit differently. First, the criteria used in this analysis are different—and better. That's because this review is part of a comprehensive series of 2010–2011 appraisals of state standards in all four of the core K-12 subjects. We worked with the expert reviewers for those subjects to construct a common grading metric and to draft improved content-specific criteria. Application of those criteria and the common metric yields—for every state in every subject—a two-part score: “Clarity and Specificity,” which can earn as many as three points, and “Content and Rigor,” which count for up to seven points. Each set of standards thus obtained a total number grade (up to ten) which was then converted to a letter grade from A through F. (See Appendix A for more detail.)

In addition to evaluating *state* U.S. history standards, and mindful that some states, districts, teacher prep programs, and textbook publishers look to the NAEP for curricular clues, we asked the Drs. Stern to appraise the NAEP U.S. history framework for fourth, eighth, and twelfth grades.

The results of this rigorous analysis paint a bleak picture: A majority of states' standards are mediocre-to-awful. In fact, the average grade across *all* states is barely a D. In twenty-eight jurisdictions—a majority of U.S. states—the history standards earn Ds or below. Eighteen earn Fs.

Just one state—South Carolina—has standards strong enough to earn a straight A. The Palmetto State deserves praise for having brought the necessary focus, rigor, and innovation to this essential element of a comprehensive education.

Six other states—Alabama, California, Indiana, Massachusetts, New York, and the District of Columbia—earn A-minuses, and three more received grades in the B range. Bravo for them. But this also means that just ten jurisdictions—not even one in five—get honors marks for grounding their standards in real history and avoiding the worst of the temptations, pitfalls, and neglect that prevail across most of the land.

The NAEP framework earns an A-minus, indicating that the content that informs and undergirds its U.S. history assessment is superior to what most states are using. No wonder student achievement on the U.S. history NAEP is so weak.

What is to be done? Nobody is coming to rescue individual states from folly, slackness, or neglect. This is different from reading and math, where states now have the option—which all but a handful have declared they will use—of substituting the Common Core for their own standards. It's also different from science, where “common” standards are beginning to be constructed and will likely be available for states' consideration by year's end. The reality is that U.S. history standards are entirely up to each state to set for itself.

But that doesn't mean those jurisdictions with weak standards must start from scratch. Instead, they could look to the states with A-range grades—or to the NAEP—and revise their own standards using those as a model. That's what the District of Columbia did. In 2003, its U.S. history standards were abysmal—among the worst in the land. In the past several years, however, D.C. officials looked to the best state standards as models, adapted them, and then adopted them. Now the District's teachers are guided by some of the strongest U.S. history standards to be found anywhere. The twenty-eight states whose standards earned Ds or Fs would do well to follow the District's lead and adopt or adapt history standards from the states whose standards have earned As. (States with C grades—and maybe also those with Bs—would be wise to follow a similar course of action.)

Let us repeat, however, that great standards alone don't produce superior results. Several states with exemplary history standards still aren't serious about course requirements, assessments, and accountability.

They may have slipshod curricula (if any), mediocre textbooks, and ill-prepared teachers. Top-notch standards alone don't get the education job done. But they're a mighty important place to start.

### » CHANGES SINCE 2003

Of the forty-five states that changed their standards since our previous analysis, fourteen have shown some improvement. Sadly, many improvements are minimal. For example, six states' grades rose only from F to D. A few, though, are dramatic—and praiseworthy. The District of Columbia went from some of the worst to some of the best standards in the nation. South Carolina, both by revising its standards and by adding innovative expository “support documents,” rose from a mediocre C to an outstanding A and now has the best U.S. history standards in the land. Michigan went from an F to a respectable B. Hawaii, Minnesota, and New Jersey moved noticeably in the right direction, going from Fs to Cs, while Florida and Louisiana rose from D to C.

On the other hand, nine states managed to make their history standards *worse* between 2003 and 2011, some dramatically so. Arizona, which received an A in 2003, earned a C in 2011. Delaware, which received a B in 2003, shamefully stripped virtually all historical content from its standards and now earns an F. Smaller but still discouraging declines were found in Kansas and Virginia (both from B to C), Nevada (from C to D), Texas (C to D), Colorado (D to F), Connecticut (D to F), and Idaho (D to F). On balance, the combination of these improvements and drops had little impact on our national average. In both 2003 and 2011, the average grade for state U.S. standards was a D.

TABLE 2 • STATE U.S. HISTORY STANDARDS IN 2011 AND 2003

Jurisdiction	2011 Grade	2003 Grade
Arkansas	D	F
District of Columbia	A-	F
Florida	C	D
Hawaii	C	F
Illinois	D	F
Kentucky	D	F
Louisiana	C	D
Michigan	B	F
Minnesota	C	F
New Jersey	C	F
New Mexico	D	F
South Carolina	A	C
Washington	D	F
West Virginia	D	F
Alabama*	A-	A
Alaska	F	F
California	A-	A
Georgia	B	B
Indiana*	A-	A
Maine	F	F
Massachusetts*	A-	A
Maryland	C	C
Mississippi	F	F
Missouri	F	F
Montana	F	F
Nebraska	C	C
New Hampshire	F	F
North Carolina	F	F

Improved

No change

Jurisdiction	2011 Grade	2003 Grade
North Dakota	F	F
New York*	A-	A
Ohio	D	D
Oklahoma*	B+	B
Pennsylvania	F	F
South Dakota	D	D
Tennessee	C	C
Utah	C	C
Vermont	F	F
Wisconsin	F	F
Wyoming	F	F
Arizona	C	A
Colorado	F	D
Connecticut	F	D
Delaware	F	B
Idaho	F	D
Kansas	C	B
Nevada	D	C
Oregon†	F	D
Texas	D	C
Virginia	C	B

No change

Worse

Notes: Iowa formally adopted U.S. history standards in 2009 (the state's standards received an F in this current 2011 evaluation). Rhode Island has thus far not adopted U.S. history standards. In 2003, neither Iowa nor Rhode Island had state-adopted U.S. history standards. Thus, neither state is featured in this table.

\* In 2003, our grading scale did not allow for pluses and minuses. In 2011, we altered our grading scale to include an A-minus and a B-plus. Therefore, grades for states that earned an A in 2003 and an A-minus in 2011 have, effectively, not changed. Likewise, states that earned a B in 2003 and a B-plus in 2011 have not changed.

† Oregon's content standards have not changed since 2001, prior to our last history standards review, *Effective State Standards for U.S. History: A 2003 Report Card*. However, the evaluation criteria that we used to judge standards in 2011 have been amended and improved since 2003. (See Appendix A for 2011 grading rubric.) These changes contributed to a change in Oregon's final grade: from a D to an F. The complete 2003 review can be found at: <http://www.edexcellence.net/publications-issues/publications/effectivestatehistory.html>.

## » WHAT GOOD STANDARDS DO RIGHT—AND WHAT BAD STANDARDS DO WRONG

Unsurprisingly, Sheldon and Jeremy Stern discovered marked differences between the best and worst state standards for U.S. history. They also found some interesting—and perhaps surprising—patterns. For example, the strongest standards tend to:

- offer coherent chronological overviews of historical content, rather than ahistoric themes organized into different social studies strands;
- offer a clear sequence of content across grades, revisiting the content of early grades in later grades in a more thorough and sophisticated manner, appropriate to students' developing cognitive abilities;
- systematically identify real (and important) people and specific events, and offer explanations of their significance;
- integrate political history with social and cultural history;
- recognize historical balance and context, discussing—for example—both the rise of political liberty and the entrenchment of slavery in America, the growing conflict between these concepts, and the long American struggle toward greater social and political justice;
- recognize America's European origins, while also acknowledging and integrating the roles and contributions of non-Western peoples;

- encourage comprehension of the past on its own terms, discouraging “presentism” — whereby students judge the past through the lens of today’s values, standards, and norms — and avoiding appeals to “personal relevance”; and
- be presented in clear, jargon-free language, with straightforward internal organization.

Strong standards, in short, provide both teachers and students with a coherent overview of what should be taught and learned, helping teachers structure their courses while giving students and parents a clear outline of what students are expected to know.

The weakest standards, on the other hand, tend to:

- ignore chronology by separating related content into social studies themes and categories;
- minimize real people and specific events, instead making broad generalizations and invoking specifics only with random and decontextualized examples;
- divide U.S. history across grades such that standards covering early American history are (typically) relegated to elementary or middle school, when students rarely possess the intellectual maturity and sophistication to study it with the necessary rigor or understanding;
- ignore political history in favor of amorphous social issues;
- be politically tendentious, seeking to mold students to specific political outlooks rather than to encourage historical comprehension or independent critical thought;
- present misleading or inaccurate content;
- encourage “presentism” rather than contextual comprehension;
- posit students’ present, personal interpretation of historical events as the main arbiter of history’s significance; and
- be couched in abstruse and often meaningless edu-jargon, and presented in overly complex and confusing mazes of charts and tables.

## » THE SOCIAL STUDIES PROBLEM

Whence do these follies and shortcomings arise? Mostly, it appears, from most states’ ill-considered decision to embed history in “social studies.”

This is not a new problem. In 2003, the year we released our last appraisal of state history standards, Fordham also published a scathing critique of the field of social studies itself, titled *Where Did Social Studies Go Wrong?* At the time, we wrote:

*Evidence also accumulated that, in the field of social studies itself, the lunatics had taken over the asylum. Its leaders were people who had plenty of grand degrees and impressive titles but who possessed no respect for Western civilization; who were inclined to view America’s evolution as a problem for humanity rather than mankind’s last, best hope; who pooh-pooed history’s chronological and factual skeleton as somehow “privileging” elites and white males over the poor and oppressed; who saw the study of geography in terms of despoiling the rain forest rather than locating London or the Mississippi River on a map; who interpreted “civics” as consisting largely of political activism and “service learning” rather than understanding how laws are made and why it is important to live in a society governed by laws; who feared that serious study of economics might give unfair advantage to capitalism (just as excessive attention to democracy might lead impressionable youngsters to judge it a superior way of organizing society); and who, in any case, took for granted that children were better off learning about their neighborhoods and “community helpers” than amazing deeds by heroes and villains in distant times and faraway places.<sup>7</sup>*

7 James Leming, Kathleen Porter-Magee, and Lucien Ellington, eds., *Where Did Social Studies Go Wrong?* (Washington, D.C.: Thomas B. Fordham Institute, 2003), 1, [www.edexcellence.net/publications-issues/publications/wheredidssgowrong.html](http://www.edexcellence.net/publications-issues/publications/wheredidssgowrong.html).

Unfortunately, this year’s fresh analysis of state history standards suggests that the “lunatics” remain very much in control across most of the country. As the Drs. Stern explain in their “Introduction and National Findings” (page 10), the single greatest failing of state standards in this field, even the best of them—is that history content remains obscured by the social studies fog.

This is a problem for two reasons. First, because social studies is a mix of several disciplines, and because social studies standards are organized according to themes or strands rather than content or chronology, teachers and students fail to grasp *why* history unfolded as it did. Second, because social studies practitioners focus more on skill acquisition than knowledge acquisition, students wind up with little true understanding of history. Maryland’s standards, for example, declare that students “will use historical thinking skills” to “examine significant ideas, beliefs, and themes; organize patterns and events; and analyze how individuals and societies have changed over time in Maryland and the United States.” Yet—as in many other state standards—this broad assertion is accompanied by little or no historical content, so it’s unclear what knowledge students will deploy when exercising these ambitious “thinking skills.”

## Conclusion

The dismal results that U.S. students achieve on assessments of their own nation’s history rarely command the same media attention or public alarm as greets our slipping international competitiveness in math and science. But they reveal a crisis of similar gravity and pose a comparable threat to America’s future.

Our historical illiteracy, however, is a self-inflicted wound. It is not something that other countries are doing to us. As this report makes clear, today’s crisis in U.S. history is fed by most states’ indifference to this subject, demonstrated by the dismal condition of the academic standards they’re using for schools, teachers, and students. While a few jurisdictions have successfully bucked this trend, most lack the content and clarity needed to provide a solid foundation for effective curriculum, assessment, and instruction. To be sure, getting U.S. history standards right won’t guarantee a great history education for American schoolchildren. Yet it is a critical starting point in our effort to drive outstanding student achievement in this essential—and overlooked—foundation of an educated citizenry. Else David McCullough’s bleak prognostication is all but certain to come true.

## Acknowledgments

Generous support for this project came from The Louis Calder Foundation and The Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation, as well as from our sister organization, the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation.

We’d also like to thank the many individuals who made this endeavor possible. First and foremost, we are deeply grateful to our content-area experts and report authors, Drs. Sheldon Stern and Jeremy Stern.

At the Fordham end, special thanks goes first to Dr. Amber Winkler, Fordham’s research director, who provided ongoing guidance and support from the project’s inception, and to Daniela Fairchild, who helped manage the project, provided editorial assistance, and generally helped steer this project toward the finish line. We are also grateful to our team of interns—Amanda Olberg, who spent countless hours verifying that the documents we had gathered were the most up-to-date, and Marena Perkins and Gerilyn Slicker, who provided general fact-checking on each of the reviews.

Special thanks go as well to the Fordham production team—Janie Scull, Amy Fagan, and Joe Portnoy—for the work they did to ensure the final report was properly edited, published, and disseminated, as well as to Samuel Whitehead for providing the cover art, and to Shannon Last and Alton Creative who helped with copyediting and layout (respectively) of the final report.



# INTRODUCTION *and* NATIONAL FINDINGS

» SHELDON M. STERN and JEREMY A. STERN

## Vanishing History Education and the Importance of Standards

It has become a cliché to speak of a crisis in American history education. But real problems, left unsolved, can easily devolve into cliché. The crisis in U.S. history education is, unfortunately, entirely real, however tiresomely it has been declared, depicted, and decried. “America is facing an identity crisis,” the Bradley Project found. “The next generation of Americans will know less than their parents about our history and founding ideals. And many Americans are more aware of what divides us than of what unites us.” Pulitzer Prize-winning historian David McCullough agrees, after decades of teaching and lecturing at colleges and universities:

*I don't think there's any question whatsoever that the students in our institutions of higher education have less grasp, less understanding, less knowledge of American history than ever before. I think we are raising a generation of young Americans who are, to a very large degree, historically illiterate.<sup>8</sup>*

Historical comprehension is vital if students are to understand their nation and world, and function as responsible, informed citizens. The study of history is of inestimable intellectual value in its own right, too, helping students understand how societies function and evolve, how ideas and beliefs change and interact—in short, what makes people *people*, and how the world we live in came to be. The nurturing of historical understanding enables young people to grasp what essayist L.P. Hartley meant when he wrote, “The past is a foreign country: they do things differently there.”<sup>9</sup>

Nonetheless, at the college level, American history requirements are an endangered species. While history courses are widely available, and in many cases quite popular, basic requirements—mandatory core surveys—are vanishing. Fewer and fewer universities *require* American history, or any history at all, as part of the undergraduate general-education curriculum. The American Council of Trustees and Alumni found in 2009 that not a single one of the twenty “top” American universities, from Brown through Yale, required undergraduates to study their own nation’s history. Likewise, of the twenty “top” liberal arts colleges, from Amherst through Williams, only the U.S. Military Academy required the study of American history. Finally, of the “60 State Flagship Institutions,” from Alabama through Wyoming, just ten required American history at the undergraduate level.<sup>10</sup>

The widespread rejection of core history requirements at the college level makes K-12 U.S. history education all the more important. Unfortunately, history education at the primary-secondary level is itself often on life support for many reasons, including that an alarming number of future history teachers pursue degrees

---

8 The Bradley Project on American National Identity, *E Pluribus Unum* (Milwaukee, WI: The Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation, 2008); Bruce Cole, “The Danger of Historical Amnesia: A Conversation with David McCullough,” *Humanities*, 23 (2002).

9 L.P. Hartley, *The Go-Between* (New York, NY: New York Review of Books, 1953).

10 *What Will They Learn?: A Report of General Education Requirements at 100 of the Nation's Leading Colleges and Universities* (Washington, D.C.: American Council of Trustees and Alumni, 2009), <http://whatwilltheylearn.com>.

in education, rather than majoring in history itself.<sup>11</sup> Worse, most education schools make minimal efforts to fill the inevitable gaps in their content knowledge, preferring instead to focus on “learning theory” that encourages skills acquisitions—such as critical thinking—rather than knowledge acquisition. If learning theory is all the *teachers* have learned, it will inevitably be the basis on which they organize their classes, with actual historical content making only occasional appearances if it happens to be “relevant.” The inevitable result will be bored, under-challenged students who, understandably, come to see history class as a waste of time.

Of course, it’s not just history teachers who need to learn essential U.S. history content. It is essential for all Americans—whether they are college-bound or not—to graduate from high school with a clear understanding of our nation’s rich history. After all, only history can provide the intellectual context on which our democracy depends for its survival. Only history can provide young Americans with an understanding of the values and traditions which unite us in spite of persistent divisions and tensions. And only history can enable students to understand how hard our predecessors fought for advances such as free speech, religious tolerance, the right to vote, minorities’ and women’s rights, and constitutional restraints on government power—advances that were daring and radical in their time, even if we now take them for granted.

That is why K-12 U.S. history standards are so critical. When properly implemented (and assessed)—and when adequate classroom time is assigned—it is these standards that provide the foundation upon which districts, schools, and teachers build their curricula and that drive their instruction.<sup>12</sup> Contrary to conventional wisdom, mandating strong standards need not stifle teacher creativity. Laying out key content does not dictate *how* that essential content should be taught; it merely provides a roadmap to help guide the way. By failing to set clear, rigorous, and comprehensive history standards, states fail to take the first and most important step toward ensuring that their schools graduate historically literate American citizens.

## The State of State U.S. History Standards

Forty-nine states and the District of Columbia offer some form of U.S. history standards. These run the gamut from impressively comprehensive to uselessly vapid. Unfortunately, the latter heavily outnumber the former. If teachers and students in much of the country are to have meaningful guidance, the standards of many states will require massive revision.

There is no predictable pattern or reliable indicator of how a state will do: A state’s size, region, and political alignment tell you little or nothing about the quality of the standards it has produced. The problems that afflict state standards are, unfortunately, far more predictable.

### » THE SOCIAL STUDIES MIASMA

The most pressing and common defect in state standards is the submersion of history in the vacuous, synthetic, and anti-historical “field” of social studies. As Diane Ravitch has opined:

<sup>11</sup> Diane Ravitch (“Who Prepares our History Teachers? Who Should Prepare our History Teachers?” *The History Teacher*, 31 (1998)) has documented that over three-quarters of America’s social studies teachers did not major or minor in history as undergraduates and most do not have degrees in any academic field. The same is true of a majority of those explicitly called history teachers. In short, most American youngsters are taught history by a teacher who “was not sufficiently interested in the subject to study it in college. Of all subjects taught in school, history has the largest proportion of teachers who are teaching ‘out of field.’” History may be extreme, but the case is not unique: The National Commission on Math and Science Teaching for the 21st Century has found that over half of high school students taking courses in science were being taught by “out of field” teachers.

<sup>12</sup> Recent education initiatives tend to emphasize math, science, and other STEM subjects, which are the focus of mandated testing. Thus, teachers are frequently pressured to devote most classroom time to the content covered in assessment tests, in which history rarely figures. See Diane Ravitch, *The Death and Life of the Great American School System: How Testing and Choice are Undermining Education* (New York: Basic Books, 2010).

*What is social studies? Or, what are social studies? Is it history with attention to current events? Is it a merger of history, geography, civics, economics, sociology, and all other social sciences? ... When social studies was first introduced in the early years of the 20th century, history was recognized as the central study of social studies. By the 1930s, it was considered primus inter pares, the first among equals. In the latter decades of the 20th century, many social studies professionals disparaged history with open disdain, suggesting that the study of the past was a useless exercise in obsolescence that attracted antiquarians and hopeless conservatives. (In the late 1980s, a president of the National Council for the Social Studies referred derisively to history as “pastology.”)*<sup>13</sup>

In fact, “social studies” is more than a method of organizing content: It is an ideology that has steadily evolved and adapted since the early twentieth century. However, its central concept remains immovable: Positing trans-historical (and often ahistorical) interpretive “concepts” over historical facts and context, it splits the past into arbitrary and thematic “strands.” It exemplifies the self-defeating “how-to-think not what-to-learn” mentality, favoring jargon-laden thinking and learning skills over specific content. Many states with the most smug introductions—touting abstract and un-measurable social studies aims, even as they boast of excellence, thoroughness, and comprehensiveness—have the worst and least substantial standards. Indeed, social studies practitioners often openly reject the notion of core curricular substance in history. Students are instead expected to analyze concepts, using whatever knowledge they may happen to acquire. They are asked to focus on what is relevant to their contemporary concerns and developing selfhood—an invitation to judge the past through a present-day lens, rather than to understand it in historical context. (This tendency is commonly known in the education field as “presentism.”)

Social studies dogma dictates a convoluted, artificial, and abstract organizational scheme. Historical content is broken up among the various categories, or “strands,” of social studies theory: The most common are history, geography, economics, and civics/government, although others may be tacked on as well. Even within these arbitrary strands, history is not presented chronologically or coherently. Instead, it is further splintered among thematic “sub-strands,” “benchmarks,” “performance descriptors,” and so forth. Each fragment of information is to be classified and sub-divided according to its place in a theoretical and conceptual hierarchy of thinking skills. History becomes a tool for understanding social studies concepts, rather than the other way around. Real people with real lives and real motivations are often ignored; the worst standards frequently fail to mention a single historical individual. All too often, standards focused on social studies make nonsense of historical context, development, and interconnection, not to mention basic accuracy. Such relentlessly ahistorical approaches rob history of its drama, inspiration, and tragedy, and will likely stunt rather than promote the interest, engagement, and intellectual development of young people.

#### » OVERLY BROAD “CONTENT” OUTLINES

A classic *Peanuts* cartoon by the late Charles M. Schulz shows Peppermint Patty at her school desk about to begin a “History Test.” The question reads: “Explain World War II.” “Explain World War II?!” Patty exclaims in astonishment. Then she sees the next line: “Use both sides of the paper if necessary.”

In fact, many state U.S. history standards offer teachers and students little more than isolated fragments of decontextualized history—often presented in absurdly overbroad directives that come startlingly close to Schulz’s caricature: “prioritize the causes and events that led to the Civil War from different perspectives” (New Jersey); “analyze the interactions among individuals and groups and their impact on significant historical events” (Wyoming); “explain how specific individuals and their ideas and beliefs influenced U.S. history” (Connecticut); “discuss the causes and effects of various conflicts in American history” (Idaho); “determine and explain the historical context of key people and events from the origins of the American Revolution through Reconstruction including the examination of different perspectives” (Colorado);

<sup>13</sup> Diane Ravitch, “A Brief History of Social Studies,” in James Leming, Lucien Ellington, and Kathleen Porter-Magee, eds., *Where Did Social Studies Go Wrong?* (Washington, D.C.: Thomas B. Fordham Institute, 2003).

“investigate the causes and effects of war in the early history of the United States” (Arkansas), and even, *pace* Charles Schulz, analyze “causes and effects of World War II” (Vermont).

When actual state standards are barely distinguishable from cartoon parody, something is definitely wrong.

Such “guidelines”—a toxic combination of the immeasurably vast and the ridiculously vague—give hardly any guidance to districts or teachers with which to draft curricula or plan lessons, and they tell students hardly anything about what they are expected to learn. The contrast with the first-rate state standards could not be more stark. The latter not only offer specifics and detail, but go beyond simple checklists, discussing *why* people and events were important, how events and ideas developed, how they are interconnected, and how primary documents can add to students’ understanding (a special strength of Massachusetts). In short, they seek to *explain* the history behind the lists of required material. A particularly impressive step in this direction has been taken by South Carolina, which offers high-quality expository “support documents” to explicate the material outlined in its standards. Of course, states that offer reasonably comprehensive checklist-style outlines still offer teachers and students something useful: In conjunction with decent textbooks and other sources, they will at least have a sense of what to cover and what to learn. But simply expecting students to explain the “causes and effects of World War II” is both preposterous and disingenuous.

#### » PROBLEMS OF SEQUENCE AND GRADE-LEVEL RIGOR

Students’ understanding, sophistication, and attention span increase dramatically between elementary and high school. Yet far too many states—even some with otherwise sound standards—make the fundamental error of splitting all U.S. history standards into a once-through progression across grade levels, so that some periods are only covered in elementary or middle school. California, for instance, despite offering one of the best content outlines in the country, covers the period to 1850 in fifth grade, from 1800 to 1914 in eighth grade, and 1900 to the present in eleventh grade. While the standards do suggest recapitulation of earlier material at the start of each grade, full coverage of earlier periods is relegated to early grades. The result is a heavy bias towards the modern period, the only era to receive in-depth treatment while students are in high school; essential foundational knowledge about the origins of our nation and its democracy is given short shrift. Indiana, also a state with strong content, follows a similar pattern. In Massachusetts, another of the best states, a two-year high school course covers the period from 1763 to the present—but the colonial era is covered only in fifth grade.

To make matters worse, many other states with far less impressive content follow the same problematic sequence—often not even calling for recapitulation of material covered in earlier grades.

This question of sequence recently erupted into public view with the controversy over North Carolina’s 2010 revision of its history standards. Many parents and educators were distressed to discover that the state proposed teaching only the period from 1877 to the present in high school. In the end, North Carolina education officials responded by placing a full, two-year U.S. history course at the high school level. But, ironically, North Carolina’s abortive plan to cover only the modern period in high school was much the same as that already used, without significant public comment, by California, Indiana, and many other states. Critics were right to challenge its wisdom in the Tar Heel State. It should also be challenged elsewhere.

#### » POLITICIZING THE PAST: THE EVER-PRESENT DANGER OF IDEOLOGICAL DISTORTION

##### ***Bias from the Left***

In 2003, at the time of the last Fordham review, many state U.S. history standards were plagued by overtly left-wing political tendentiousness and ideological indoctrination. There has been some retreat from such open bias since then. Nonetheless, more recent standards provide abundant evidence that political correctness remains alive in American classrooms. Lists of specific examples are routinely little more than

diversity-driven checklists of historically marginalized groups. North Dakota, in one typical case, offers this slanted, chronologically muddled, and historically nonsensical selection of famous Americans in the early grades: “George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, Susan B. Anthony, Abraham Lincoln, Harriet Tubman, Martin Luther King, Jr., Rosa Parks, César Chávez, [and] Sacagawea.” Likewise, in multiple states, the World War II home front is reduced to the experiences of women, African Americans, and interned Japanese Americans—students would hardly guess that *all* Americans participated in and were personally affected by the war effort. Political bias is, indeed, less strident in many cases than it was in 2003. Yet bias by selective emphasis is still bias.

Lamentably, outright politicized distortion continues to appear as well. Surely the most persistent example is the fictitious notion that the Iroquois League was a crucial influence on the drafting of the Constitution in 1787. There is not a shred of historical evidence for this assertion—yet it continues to appear as historical fact in the academic standards of many states.<sup>14</sup>

Too often, uncomfortable and complex historical realities are evaded and oversimplified. While most states rightly address the horror of the Atlantic slave trade, *not a single state* tells the full story. Many standards mention that Africans were “abducted,” “captured,” “seized,” and marched in chains and shackles to be sold—without ever revealing that their original captors were themselves Africans: “Africans and Europeans [and, later, Americans] stood together as equals [in the slave trade], companions in commerce and profit. Kings exchanged respectful letters across color lines and addressed each other as colleagues.”<sup>15</sup> Even the best state standards are evasive on this point. South Carolina’s superlative expository “support documents” provide a solid discussion of the Atlantic slave trade, yet merely note that “slaves were transported first from the interior of Africa to the slave ships,” never mentioning that these Africans were enslaved, transported from the interior, and sold to Europeans by other Africans. Likewise, slave systems in the West Indies and North America are discussed, but there is no reference to slavery in Africa.

Also widespread in state history standards is politically correct “presentism”—encouraging students to judge the past by present-day moral and political standards, rather than to comprehend past actions, decisions, and motives in the context of their times. Several states, for example, prod students to fault the revolutionary generation for denying full equality to women and blacks—without explaining that *in the context* of the late eighteenth century, the idea of government based even on the votes of white, property-owning males was itself radical and untested.

Exposure to the full truth about complex historical events is essential if students are to learn to avoid simplistic and politically correct finger-pointing and instead achieve genuine understanding of historical causality. Not even the most determined social studies advocates would expect students to judge Washington for failing to end the Revolutionary War by using jet fighter planes against the British. Nonetheless, many standards continue to encourage students to fault people in the past for not accepting ideas, values, and beliefs (such as gender equality) which, *in their historical context*, were as anachronistic or non-existent as modern technology.

### **Bias from the Right**

A more recent problem has lately drawn considerable media attention to the issue of state standards. While the dominant political influence on education, at all levels, continues to come from the left, political intrusion is now developing from the right as well.

Even as the left pushes stories of American perfidy, the right counters with triumphal accounts of American perfection. Conservative bias is as much a form of political correctness as its liberal counterpart: Both

<sup>14</sup> See, for example, a trenchant refutation of this resilient myth by Pulitzer Prize-winning historian Gordon Wood: Gordon S. Wood, “The Purpose of the Past: Reflections on the Use of History,” *Historically Speaking*, Vol. 10, no. 1, Jan. 2009, p. 4.

<sup>15</sup> Charles Johnson, Patricia Smith, and the WGBH Series Research Team, *Africans in America: America’s Journey through Slavery* (New York, NY: Harcourt Brace, 1998).

seek to use history education to promote an ideological and political agenda. Both are, at best, historically misleading and potentially damaging to our shared values as a nation. Leftist criticism of education gained strength because the old, traditional narrative *was* overly celebratory and exclusionist. The left went much too far in the other direction: In an effort to include those previously excluded, they all too often excluded those previously included. Yet a return to the *old* distortions is hardly the answer for twenty-first century America.

Most of today's state standards either strive for political balance or tilt leftward. Yet there are occasional counter-examples: The Kansas standards, for instance, seem to prod students to condemn the New Deal as an ineffective and dangerous expansion of government. Still, the leading edge of the conservative effort is in Texas, where a highly public and blatantly partisan battle has erupted into the national media. The conservative majority on the Texas State Board of Education (SBOE) has openly sought to use the state curriculum to promote its political priorities, molding the telling of the past to justify its current views and aims. Indeed, the SBOE majority displayed overt hostility and contempt for historians and scholars, whom they derided as insidious activists for a liberal academic establishment.

Throughout the Texas standards, dozens of references (even the *title* of the high school economics course) offer a drumbeat of uncritical celebration of “the free enterprise system and its benefits”—resembling, in an inverted historical echo, Soviet schools harping on the glories of state socialism. Native Americans, disproportionately discussed in many other states, are almost totally missing. Slavery is downplayed and segregation barely mentioned—omissions pointedly noted by former U.S. education secretary (and Houston superintendent) Rod Paige.<sup>16</sup> Members of the SBOE also showed themselves determined to inject their personal religious beliefs into history education. “Judeo-Christian (especially biblical law)” and “Moses” are, incredibly, listed as the *principal* political influences on America's founders. The separation of church and state, a much-debated and crucial concept in the drafting of the state constitutions (1777–1781) and the federal Constitution (1787), is simply dismissed.

This ideological manipulation has been challenged, and not only from the doctrinaire left. Secretary Paige explicitly warned that “ideology” had been allowed “to drive and define” the Texas standards. History education should not merely swing “from liberal to conservative,” he declared, or “carry political ideology for either party”: History should “speak its authoritative voice through the qualified historians and educators.” Members of the SBOE, Paige noted, wanted the standards to be “fair” only to their chosen shibboleths. But history, as he noted, is not “fair”—it is what it is, and the standards should lay out facts, including those which “were negative.” “It makes no sense,” as Diane Ravitch has similarly argued, “to have an elected or appointed school board deciding which facts belong in history textbooks and which scientific ideas are valid. They do not have the qualifications to do this and they should not have the power to do it.”<sup>17</sup>

## » IDEOLOGICAL CO-DEPENDENCY: THE CYCLE OF SELF-PERPETUATION

The ultimate irony is that educational ideologues on both left and right feed off each other in an endless cycle of self-righteous distortion. The right believes that political correctness undermines pride in America's heritage; hoping to reclaim and restore the “real America,” it seeks to revive a narrow and outmoded historical perspective. The left-wing educational establishment, in turn, continues to present itself as a

<sup>16</sup> Paige objected in the hearings (May 19, 2010) that “the institution of slavery and the civil rights movement are dominant elements in our history and shape who we are today.”

<sup>17</sup> SBOE hearings, May 19, 2010; “2 Notable Voices Joining Chorus against Book Plan,” *San Antonio News-Express* online, May 18, 2010; Diane Ravitch, “‘T’ is for ‘Texas Textbooks’: The Lone Star State mandates the teaching of patriotism—and promotes ignorance in the process,” *Daily Beast*, March 14, 2010. None of the SBOE leaders are subject-matter experts. The chairman and leader of the conservative faction is a dentist; the educational background of the SBOE's “expert” historical adviser is a B.A. in “religious education” from Oral Roberts University; another member justified an amendment by citing her “research” on Google (Texas SBOE public hearings, Mar. 11, 2010).

heroic minority, battling against the traditional “triumphalist” curriculum that they insist still dominates schools—despite the fact that its own views have long since become entrenched educational orthodoxy.

The majority of the Texas SBOE, regrettably, has not sought to redress such left-leaning distortion and ideology by promoting objectivity. They do not, in fact, inherently object to the concept of education as a tool for indoctrination. Rather, they wish to substitute the *right* ideology (in both senses of the word) for that of the left. Such efforts, laden with contempt for historical scholarship and analysis, are not only harmful in themselves—they play straight into the left-wing victim narrative, strengthening its grip in other states and threatening the progress that has been made in breaking its hold. A reinvigorated left will then further goad the right, leading to a vicious cycle of accusations and politics at the expense of education. The chief casualties are historical comprehension, and the good of the students themselves—which is always the case when education becomes an ideological weapon.

### **No Excuses: the Availability of First-rate Models**

One thing must be abundantly clear: The many states that offer little or no historical content have no excuse for this egregious failure. Even if a state is not in a position to prepare its own rigorous standards, it has unlimited and free recourse to the excellent standards of *other* states.

Puzzlingly, several states claim to have consulted the best standards yet seem to have learned nothing from them. The District of Columbia, by contrast, could fairly serve as a model for other jurisdictions with weak standards. In 2006, the District prepared new standards, largely by combining material from the highly-regarded California and Massachusetts documents. The result is one of the best sets of standards in the country. Indeed, by developing its own grade-level sequence (avoiding California’s unfortunate once-thorough sequence over grades five, eight, and eleven) and adding additional content of its own, the District arguably created a document better than either of its principal sources. Many states would do well to emulate its example.

South Carolina, meanwhile, has introduced an entirely new model, transcending the limitations of even the most comprehensive outline-format standards. Even the best outline can only offer structure and key ideas. But in 2008, the Palmetto State added a set of “support documents,” which dramatically expand the outline with a substantive *historical narrative* of remarkable sophistication and depth. The result is a unique and valuable resource, not only for South Carolina teachers, but also for teachers across the nation—leaving absolutely no excuse for the near-total lack of substance in many state U.S. history standards.

It is particularly instructive—and encouraging—to conclude by noting that the District of Columbia and South Carolina, polar opposites politically, have put their students’ interests first by creating two of the nation’s best U.S. history standards.

# NAEP • U.S. HISTORY FRAMEWORK



GRADE

**A-**

SCORES

Content and Rigor **7/7**  
Clarity and Specificity **2/3**

TOTAL SCORE

**9/10**

## Introduction

The principal strength of the 2006 *National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) U.S. History Framework*, used once again in the 2010 assessment cycle, is that it provides an evenhanded, thoughtful, and ideologically balanced approach to U.S. history. The framework could, however, do a better job of defining what is most essential and important for U.S. history courses to cover.

## Organization of the Standards

The NAEP history framework is designed to outline:

- *what* history content and skills should be measured at grades 4, 8, and 12;
- *how* the domain of content is most appropriately measured in a large-scale assessment; and
- *how much* of the content domain, in terms of knowledge and skills, should students know and be able to do at the basic, proficient, and advanced levels.

In order to do this, the framework is divided into three sections: four “themes in U.S. history,” eight chronological “periods of U.S. history,” (shown below), and specific “ways of thinking about U.S. history.” Within each chronological period, the framework also provides thorough and specific “defining questions” (organized around the four themes) in order to structure the essential knowledge and skills that students need to succeed on the U.S. history assessment.

Themes	Chronological Periods
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Change and Continuity in American Democracy: Ideas, Institutions, Events, Key Figures, and Controversies.</li> <li>◦ The Gathering and Interactions of Peoples, Cultures, and Ideas.</li> <li>◦ Economic and Technological Changes and Their Relationship to Society, Ideas, and the Environment.</li> <li>◦ The Changing Role of America in the World.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Beginnings to 1607</li> <li>◦ Colonization, Settlement, and Communities (1607–1763)</li> <li>◦ The Revolution and the New Nation (1763–1815)</li> <li>◦ Expansion and Reform (1801–1861)</li> <li>◦ Crisis of the Union: Civil War and Reconstruction (1850–1877)</li> <li>◦ The Development of Modern America (1865–1920)</li> <li>◦ Modern America and the World Wars (1914–1945)</li> <li>◦ Contemporary America (1945 to the present)</li> </ul>

### ✓ DOCUMENTS REVIEWED<sup>1</sup>

**U.S. History Framework for the 2006 National Assessment of Educational Progress (2006)**

**Accessed from:**

[http://www.nagb.org/publications/frameworks/history\\_o6.pdf](http://www.nagb.org/publications/frameworks/history_o6.pdf)

<sup>1</sup> The 2010 NAEP U.S. History Framework (<http://www.nagb.org/publications/frameworks/historyframework.pdf>) appears to be substantively identical to the 2006 version. The introductions to the 2006 and 2010 versions both state that the most recent revision took place in 2003.

The NAEP Framework, it must be emphasized, is offered as just that: a framework on which to plan and draft assessment testing. It is not a set of standards for classroom instruction. However, as Chester E. Finn, Jr. and Amber Winkler have observed, assessment frameworks are widely used “in standards setting and benchmarking particularly” because, ultimately, “what gets tested is what gets taught.” It is “therefore important to appraise their content” and “their likely impact at the classroom level”—even though state officials must remain aware of frameworks’ “limitations and... appreciate what else may be needed to generate complete standards and curricula.”<sup>2</sup>

## Evaluation

The Framework begins with some basic assumptions about the nature of U.S. history in order to “establish a context that includes the political, social, cultural, economic, technological, philosophical, and religious dimensions of human activities.” These assumptions include:

- Analyzing change and continuity over time by exploring “the range of choices that have been available to people” and “have been the most significant in our nation’s development”;
- Including the perspective of both “*famous people and ordinary individuals* and events on the grand scale and in everyday life to convey the ideas and experiences that have shaped U.S. history” (emphasis added);
- Studying the nation’s political ideals of individual dignity, individual rights, civic virtue, democracy, the rule of law, equal justice, and the right to dissent;
- Recognizing that students “must know the specific facts of American history” in order to “judge evidence responsibly” and understand “*how complex and sometimes ambiguous the explanation of historical events can be*” (emphasis added); and
- Addressing the conflict between the founding proposition that “all men are created equal” and the reality “*that enormous inequalities...were common and accepted practice throughout the world at the outset of the American experiment*” (emphasis added).

As indicated above, particularly by the italicized phrases, the Framework specifically and admirably avoids both presentism—the tendency to view past events through

today’s norms and values—and simplistic, politically correct judgmentalism. For example, it asserts at the outset that Western Europeans “principally” shaped colonial American settlements, but acknowledges that Native Americans and Africans also helped to create “a new and uniquely American culture in the 17th and 18th centuries.” This overall tone is extremely important. It suggests a retreat from the most tendentious flaw in the “multicultural” history of the 1990s—namely, that including the story of those previously excluded (minorities, women, etc.) often resulted in largely excluding the story of those previously included (famous dead white males). The NAEP Framework reflects a more judicious approach in which teachers and students are expected to know the stories of minorities and women *in addition* to those of Washington, Lincoln, and other luminaries.

By emphasizing context and complexity rather than judgments based on modern-day perspectives, the Framework should not only clarify what students actually know, but, at the same time, help students develop genuine historical understanding. The NAEP basic assumptions stress that students must understand the ambiguity and uncertainty of events in their full historical context. This, in turn, requires understanding the futility of criticizing people in the past for the absence of ideas, beliefs, and values which were embryonic or even nonexistent in *their* time—such as racial equality. The NAEP basic assumptions make clear that it is a waste of precious classroom time to self-righteously judge the past from the perspective of the early twenty-first century.<sup>3</sup>

Finally, while many history and social studies standards eschew chronology in favor of organizing historical content primarily by theme, the NAEP history framework asserts clearly that “because history is concerned with the experiences of people over time, it is critical to establish a basic chronological structure to organize it.” The eight chronological periods shown on page 17 unify the assessment and its historical content. By organizing essential content chronologically, the NAEP framework underscores the importance of understanding how historical events unfolded and impacted one another without trying to force sometimes unrelated events into arbitrary boxes defined by narrow and ahistorical themes.

Within each of the eight chronological periods, content is presented via a series of defining questions organized

<sup>2</sup> Chester E. Finn, Jr. and Amber M. Winkler, “Introduction,” in Shiela Byrd Carmichael et al., *Stars by Which to Navigate? Scanning National and International Education Standards in 2009: An Interim Report on Common Core, NAEP, TIMSS, and PISA* (Washington, D.C.: Thomas B. Fordham Institute, 2009).

<sup>3</sup> A Boston historical site, beginning in the 1990s, featured an exhibit on Phyllis Wheatley, the late eighteenth-century African American poet. The exhibit noted that Wheatley was excluded from the Boston Town Meeting both because she was a woman and because she was black. Students were asked to post replies to the following question, “Who would you exclude from these meetings?” The students, of course, all proclaimed proudly, if not smugly, that they would not exclude anyone. Sadly, these young people had missed out on a potentially excellent opportunity to learn how to think historically.

around the four historical themes. These questions are clear, thoughtful, substantive, and balanced. For example:

- “How did various European colonists reshape their political, legal, and philosophical traditions to fit their circumstances in North America? In the English colonies, what practices of self-government and laws developed?”
- “What were the political debates regarding independence and the creation of new state governments and a national government?”
- “What were the major conflicts between big business and labor? What was the role of the federal government in resolving such disputes?”
- “How did the Depression change assumptions about the nature of federalism and the role of the government?”
- “What combination of ideology, economics, historical circumstances, individual viewpoints, and other factors shaped the history of the Cold War? What factors led to its end?”

Unfortunately, the questions relating to the periods of U.S. history do not explicitly address grade-level differentiation. The sample questions just cited would surely be inappropriate at the fourth-grade level and in most cases at the eighth-grade level as well. In short, it would be helpful if the framework made clearer what level of knowledge and analytic prowess it is reasonable to expect at various grade levels, since the assessment questions will be administered and scored in grade-specific ways. However, the much smaller number of U.S. history questions included in the *NAEP Sample Questions* for assessment, published separately, do differentiate between levels of complexity in the fourth, eighth, and twelfth grades.<sup>4</sup>

## Content and Rigor Conclusion

The NAEP Framework emphasizes “knowing and understanding people, events...contexts, and historical sources” as well as the importance of “multiple perspectives and seeing an era or movement through the eyes of different groups.” The document also stresses “establishing cause-and-effect relationships,” “weighing evidence to draw sound conclusions,” and “making defensible generalizations.” The historical material, covered in only eighteen pages, is a strikingly rich and comprehensive body of U.S. history content that can usefully guide both test developers and those who opt to align their academic standards or curricula with the NAEP. Viewed as a whole, the NAEP Framework succeeds admirably in defining a core of literacy in U.S. history and earns a seven

out of seven for Content and Rigor. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

## Clarity and Specificity Conclusion

The content in the NAEP Framework is presented as a set of questions; these questions, nonetheless, lay out a general but clear and remarkably specific description of the important historical knowledge and appropriate achievement-level expectations for students in the fourth, eighth, and twelfth grades. The framework could, arguably, delineate this historical content somewhat more consistently (with fewer gaps), but it nonetheless succeeds in “delineating the *knowledge* and skills to be tested at each grade” (emphasis added). The framework earns a two out of three for Clarity and Specificity. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

4 National Assessment of Educational Progress, *Sample Questions: General Information about the Nation's Report Card, 2006: Grades 4, 8, and 12* (Washington, D.C.: National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, 2006).

# ALABAMA • U.S. HISTORY



GRADE

**A-**

SCORES

Content and Rigor **6/7**  
Clarity and Specificity **3/3**

TOTAL SCORE

**9/10**

## Overview

Despite some gaps in content or detail and occasional thematic departures from chronology, Alabama’s U.S. history standards offer a rigorous and thorough overview of American history. In addition, the state’s decision to offer a full two-year U.S. history course at both the elementary and high school levels demonstrates an impressive commitment to history education.

## Goals and Organization

Alabama’s social studies standards are presented in a single, coherent document. While the state does identify four strands—economics, geography, history, and political science—grade-by-grade standards are presented in a straightforward, chronological outline. Numbered chronological and thematic headings are supplied with content expectations in bullet-point form. Related content is woven together rather than arbitrarily split into strand-based thematic blocks; checkboxes next to each numbered heading indicate which strands are relevant to that heading’s content. Local history is also integrated with American history at most grade levels: An Alabama icon indicates content expectations relevant to state history.

Kindergarten through third grade introduce basic concepts of chronology, distinctions between past and present, prominent American and Alabaman symbols and holidays, along with basic ideas of civics and government. Fourth grade focuses on Alabama history and geography.

Serious study of American history is introduced with a two-year course in fifth grade (to 1877) and sixth grade (1877 to the present). American history resumes with a second two-year course in tenth grade (again to 1877, though pre-settlement Native American cultures, covered in fifth grade, are omitted) and eleventh grade (1877 to the present). These are complemented by a twelfth-grade U.S. government course.

## Evaluation

Alabama’s social studies standards stress a thorough and rigorous progression of important historical content, starting in the early grades. Historical knowledge is consistently emphasized as a crucial basis for informed citizenship.

As in many states, Kindergarten focuses on community, but content grows more specific and advanced at each grade level. Second grade introduces the lives of famous historical individuals; fourth grade offers an unusually detailed local history curriculum for this age level—one that deals directly with slavery, secession, Jim Crow, and civil rights.

### DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

**Alabama Course of Study: Social Studies, U.S. history segments (2004)**

**Accessed from:**

<http://www.alsde.edu/html/sections/documents.asp?section=54&sort=5&footer=sections>

The first U.S. history course, in fifth and sixth grades, provides an admirable degree of specificity. The fifth-grade standards are particularly strong. They begin with prehistoric migrations and Native American cultures, move to European exploration—its motives, actors, and patrons—and early settlements; key colonial leaders, regions, crops, and religious differences; the rise of representative assemblies and town meetings; and the rise of slavery and the use of indentured servants. The standards also cover the Revolutionary and post-Revolutionary period with commendable specificity. For instance, students are to consider “efforts to mobilize support for the American Revolution by the Minutemen, Committees of Correspondence, First Continental Congress, Sons of Liberty, boycotts, and the Second Continental Congress.” Material on the American system of government is integrated, not split into a separate “civics” segment. The early nineteenth century is, unfortunately, far more rushed—yet the decisive role of slavery in the coming of the Civil War is candidly acknowledged.

The sixth-grade course is, regrettably, somewhat patchier than the fifth-grade course, jumping from post-Civil War westward expansion to the Spanish American War and the Panama Canal, Progressivism, and then World War I; a single segment then deals with “cultural and economic developments in the society of the United States from 1877 through the 1930s.” But the roots and results of the Great Depression are dealt with thoroughly, as are the causes and effects of World War II; post-war events are summarized succinctly but intelligently, touching on most key points. Despite some gaps in detail, on balance these are solid content guidelines for primary grades.

When U.S. history resumes with the *second* two-year course, in tenth and eleventh grades, the standards commendably seek to “build upon the foundation students gained in the study of the United States in Grades 5 and 6.” All of American history is again covered, with greater sophistication and depth—although, as noted, pre-settlement cultures, covered in fifth grade, are omitted. Early sections again cover the expansionist and mercantile conflicts among European powers, the complex motives which led to the establishment of the colonies, the introduction of slavery in the early seventeenth century, and escalating tensions between local colonial governments and Great Britain. The major weakness is a lack of explanatory detail; major issues are generally pointed out, but not always explicated. For instance, students are to describe “tensions that developed between the colonists and their local governments and between the colonists and Great Britain” and “reasons for American victory in the American Revolution”—but no examples are given. Nonetheless, key issues are frequently outlined admirably—the rise of representative institutions, the evolution of chattel slavery, the Great Awakening, and the importance of the French and Indian War, to name a few. For

such issues, teachers may have to supply further details from other sources.

Chronology and specificity break down somewhat following the Articles of Confederation and Constitution. The 1790s—including the rise of the party system—and the election of 1800 are glossed over in a single sentence; Supreme Court decisions from *Marbury v. Madison* to *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia* and lumped together with inadequate explanation; foreign relations “from 1781 to 1823” are compressed, hardly mentioning the War of 1812 (which received serious attention in fifth grade). But focus returns with abolitionism, sectionalism, the coming of the Civil War, and Reconstruction—again, slavery and its aftermath are dealt with openly and honestly. The course makes no effort to either glorify or conceal the role of Alabama in the antebellum period.

The eleventh-grade course discusses the post-Civil War shift away from agrarianism. Progressivism is treated in particular detail, followed by American imperialism, World War I, and the 1920s. Detail remains uneven, though; for example, coverage of the Spanish American War is better than in most states, yet a directive to explain “major events of World War I” is decidedly thin. The roots of the 1929 economic collapse are well covered, yet the section on New Deal programs oddly omits the WPA—which *did* appear in the sixth-grade materials. The roots of World War II, apart from isolationism, are given short shrift, though the war’s impact is better handled. The post-war period is again somewhat rushed and disorganized. The roots of the Cold War are briefly but reasonably summarized, and linked to the rise of McCarthyism. Most post-war subjects are covered quickly and generally but the civil rights movement receives admirably detailed coverage. An exceedingly short final unit covers the entire period from Nixon to the present, though it cites a fair number of specifics (Watergate, Reagan’s Berlin Wall speech, Clinton’s impeachment, NAFTA, and the September 11 attacks).

Teachers should be wary of the emphasis in the standards’ introductory material on “current technology such as interactive digital video software and Internet sources that allow students to explore historical topics and interpretations more extensively than in the past.” Much of the historical material on the Internet is not accurate, reliable, or impartial.

## Content and Rigor Conclusion

Despite some substantive gaps and breaks in chronological presentation, Alabama’s standards provide solid content and guidance for teachers and students. The standards prioritize important content, and rigor increases appropriately throughout the grade levels. In addition, Alabama’s decision to “weave” the various social studies “strands” together, rather than split

related content into arbitrary thematic units, appropriately elevates historical content over social studies theory.

Finally, Alabama’s decision to require *two* two-year courses on American history—including a full course in high school, when students have achieved considerable sophistication—shows an unusual and admirable commitment to American history education. Taken together, these standards give teachers and students substantial tools with which to build solid history education, and earn a six out of seven for Content and Rigor. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

### **Clarity and Specificity Conclusion**

Alabama’s standards document is admirably clear and straightforward. Despite some shortcomings, the level of detail increases appropriately as students move from the elementary to high school courses, providing teachers and students with clear guidance as to what is expected at each successive grade level. The introductory materials contain some social studies jargon and theory, but they generally do not dilute substance. Any problem is more than offset by the specifics and coherence of the historical material and the clarity with which it is presented. Teachers, parents, and students can read this document and understand what is expected of school-aged children. As such, the standards earn a perfect three out of three for Clarity and Specificity. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

# ALASKA • U.S. HISTORY



GRADE

**F**

SCORES

Content and Rigor 0/7  
Clarity and Specificity 0/3

TOTAL SCORE

**0/10**

## Overview

Alaska’s inaptly named *Content and Performance Standards* outline neither a grade-by-grade sequence of suggested (let alone required) history courses, nor any grade-specific history content expectations. Consequently, these “standards” create little confidence that Alaskan students will learn the U.S. history content necessary for all literate American citizens.

## Goals and Organization

Alaska’s social studies standards are divided into two categories: three broad “content standards” —labeled geography, history, and government and citizenship—and grade-specific “performance standards/grade level expectations.”

The content standards, however, do not actually specify content. Instead, they each describe four to seven broad and abstract goals. In history, for example, one of the four stated goals calls for students to “understand historical themes through factual knowledge of time, places, ideas, institutions, cultures, people, and events.” Then, within each such goal, the standards describe (again, broadly) the skills that students must master to meet the stated goal.

Even more vexing, the performance standards/grade level expectations in history are *not* presented by grade level. Instead, the state explains, its history standards lay out “the cumulative knowledge a student must demonstrate in order to fulfill the Alaska history graduation requirement.” Thus, no U.S. history sequence is actually specified; students are expected to master the content to which the standards allude, yet no particular subject matter is assigned to any particular grade.

Furthermore, the “cumulative knowledge” targets outlined in the standards are confined *solely* to local Alaskan history. The course of study is limited to five chronological eras: Indigenous Alaskans before Western Contact; Colonial Era—The Russian Period (1747–1867); Colonial Era—The United States Period (1867–1912); Alaska as a Territory (1912–1959); Alaska as a State (1959–present).

Each era is then split—in typical social studies fashion—into thematic rather than chronological subunits: people, places, and environment; consumption, production, and distribution; individual, citizenship, governance, and power; and continuity and change.

While the state does provide a *Social Studies Framework* with sample exercises for various age ranges (not grade levels), these exercises are linked to the analytical themes and skills listed in the content standards, and they provide little additional content or guidance to teachers.

### ✓ DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

**Content and Performance Standards for Alaska Students, U.S. history segments (2006)**

**Accessed from:**

<http://www.eed.state.ak.us/standards/pdf/standards.pdf>

**Social Studies Framework, Alaska Department of Education & Early Development, U.S. history segments (1995)**

**Accessed from:**

<http://www.eed.state.ak.us/tls/frameworks/ssstudies/first.htm>

## Evaluation

At first glance, the history content standards seem promising. Two pages of rather general “concept skills” indicate that students should be able to: understand chronological frameworks for organizing historical thought and placing significant ideas, institutions, people, and events within time sequences; know that the interpretation of history may change as new evidence is discovered; understand that history is dynamic and composed of key turning points; evaluate the influence of context upon historical understanding; apply thinking skills (e.g., classifying, interpreting, analyzing, summarizing, synthesizing, and evaluating) to understand the historical record; use historical perspective to solve problems, make decisions, and understand other traditions.

These are worthy aims. But even here, there are problems. For example, students are also expected to critique “the mistakes of social organizations” in the past—an open invitation to judge yesterday’s events by today’s standards, rather than to understand them in context. There is also a predictable emphasis on “class, ethnicity, race, and gender,” again encouraging students to decry history’s failure to live up to modern standards of diversity and tolerance, rather than to understand why people believed in what they were doing at the time.

In the end, of course, the success of these standards depends on the substantive historical knowledge and sophistication of Alaska’s teachers—and here the standards do little to assist teachers in developing or applying such knowledge.

Still larger problems emerge when one turns to the history segment of the performance standards/grade level expectations. Again, the abstract aims seem promising, emphasizing “the scholarly approach of the historian,” “knowledge of specifics,” and “knowledge of context.”

This is all well and good—except that the performance standards/grade level expectations that follow (which, as noted above, are *not* presented for individual grade levels) *cover nothing but Alaskan history*.

The core historical skills to be mastered by graduation, including the “critical examination of evidence,” and the “careful weighing of facts and hypotheses,” are spelled out. However, *no* broader study of the history of the United States is specified. It is difficult for students to “weigh” historical facts or evidence if they have never been exposed to the actual history.

Study of the United States beyond Alaska appears to be *tacitly* assumed: Some of the sample exercises in the *Social Studies Framework* mention broader American history, including major cultures, eras, wars, some political leaders, famous individuals,

and so forth. But though these passing references seem to assume a larger history curriculum, no such curriculum is outlined or specified; even the grade levels at which these scattered facts will be introduced are in no way indicated.

The government and citizenship content standards add a few more references to American historical content (e.g., comprehension of the nation’s founding documents and governing principles). The cultural standard section stresses the importance of students’ knowledge of personal and community history and how they relate to traditional practices and the wider society. It also includes a useful set of recommendations about the need to understand that different cultures may have differing but equally compelling outlooks.

Again, however, there is no specific historical overview—indeed, there is no historical curriculum beyond Alaskan history itself.

## Content and Rigor Conclusion

Alaska claims that these standards give “educators, families, and policymakers solid information with which to hold schools and communities accountable for the academic achievement of children and prepare all Alaska students for the future.” Regrettably, the standards cannot achieve such goals without considerably more work.

Local/state history should be a strong part of any good public-school curriculum, and Alaska’s standards do spell out much of this. But they fail entirely to delineate expectations or outline content for any broader American history curriculum. Although the state seems to assume that U.S. history will be taught, teachers are offered no guidance on constructing a curriculum. Since there is no grade-specific content to assess—and hardly any content at all—Alaska earns a zero out of seven for Content and Rigor. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

## Clarity and Specificity Conclusion

Alaska’s standards offer no sequence whatsoever, assigning no content to any particular grade and creating no guidelines for when and how U.S. history should be taught. They only purport to inform teachers and students what should be taught and learned by the completion of high school. Most U.S. history is not covered at all, and there can be no specificity where there is no content. Alaska earns a zero out of three for Clarity and Specificity. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

# ARIZONA • U.S. HISTORY



## GRADE

C

## SCORES

Content and Rigor 4/7  
Clarity and Specificity 1/3

## TOTAL SCORE

5/10

## Overview

Arizona’s standards stress abstract concepts over clear chronological development. Furthermore, what is at times a competent historical overview is seriously undermined by illogical division of time periods among grades. Moreover, both jargon and political ideology intrude far too often.

## Goals and Organization

Arizona’s *Social Studies Standard* is divided into five strands: American history, world history, civics/government, geography, and economics. The American history strand is then divided into subsections called “concepts”; after a general section on “research skills,” these concepts comprise chronological subdivisions. Finally, grade-specific learning expectations are provided for grades K–8.

The high school standards are organized similarly, except that only a single set of standards is provided for grades 9–12.

Basic concepts (such as chronology, cause and effect, and primary versus secondary sources) are stressed in the early grades, but material is often illogically broken up and confusing. Historical content continues to be divided arbitrarily across grades as the curriculum develops. The Revolutionary period is covered in Kindergarten and then in second, fifth, and eighth grades. The 1800–1860 period is discussed in second, fourth, and fifth grades, but not again until high school. The Civil War is covered in third, fourth, fifth, and seventh grades (and as part of Arizona history in fourth grade), and then in high school. The era from 1875–1929 is covered in third and fourth grades (again as part of the Arizona history) and then in seventh grade and in high school. The Revolutionary period is discussed in eighth grade, *after* covering the era from the Civil War to the Great Depression in seventh grade. World War II and the Cold War and its aftermath pop up in eighth grade and again in high school.

## Evaluation

Arizona’s standards make a promising start by introducing elementary school students to the distinction between primary and secondary sources and, most importantly, to the need to understand the chronological order and interrelatedness of historical events. First-grade students use primary sources such as maps, photos, and artifacts. By second grade, students are learning to place historical events “in chronological order on a timeline.” By sixth grade, students are expected to “determine the credibility and bias of primary and secondary sources” and analyze “the cause and effect relationships between and among individuals and/or historical events.”

## DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

Arizona Academic Standards: The Social Studies Standard Articulated by Grade Level, U.S. history segments (2006)

### Accessed from:

<http://www.ade.state.az.us/standards/sstudies/articulated/>

But the success of such abstract pedagogical goals must ultimately be judged by the accuracy and coherence of the substantive historical material on which they are based. The standards do attempt to build historical comprehension gradually in the early grades, introducing a few key concepts that small children can understand, then adding complexity when they are somewhat older. Yet in the general skills sections, for example, the division of content among grades often seems arbitrary and repetitive.

More importantly, related history and ideas, which clearly must be understood together, are sometimes introduced several grades apart. For example, the early exploration of the Americas is dealt with at some length in Kindergarten and first grade, but the notion that explorers were motivated by “economic and political reasons” is not mentioned until third grade.

For the most part, the actual historical outlines are presented chronologically within each grade, providing a reasonable amount of information. But material continues to be illogically broken up across grades as the curriculum develops. The awkward and counterintuitive grade-by-grade sequence jumps about from era to era, preventing students from comprehending clear sequential development.

Regrettably, there are unmistakable and repeated intrusions of ideology. In discussing pre-contact cultures of the Americas, for instance, the Arizona standards present an idealized portrait of “the achievements and features (e.g., mathematics, astronomy, architecture)” of the Mayan, Aztec, and Inca civilizations. Surely, students should also learn about the existence of aggression, war, slavery, and human sacrifice in these cultures. Even as late as sixth grade, the standards merely add “government, social structure, [and] arts and crafts” to the earlier list of Mesoamerican achievements. Some of the more graphic details are probably inappropriate at the earliest grades, but leaving them out entirely is dishonest and misleading.

The high school section on the American Revolution likewise promotes the entirely mythic historical importance of the Iroquois League in American constitutionalism, yet fails to mention the crucial experimentation that took place in the state constitutions between 1776 and 1781. When students are asked to analyze the experiences and perspectives of various groups in the Revolutionary era, the list of choices is extremely skewed—of the five groups, four are clearly intended as marginalized victims: African Americans, women, Native Americans, and indentured servants. The only other group mentioned is “property owners”—whom students are plainly meant to judge negatively in comparison.

Oddly, the content of the high school sections often lacks the specificity found in the earlier grades. The 1929–1945 section,

while including some key points, is egregiously sketchy—it manages to include Japanese internment and the atomic bombings, while ignoring the rise of fascism and the roots of World War II. The Navaho code talkers (an Arizona connection, to be sure) and minority participation in military units are offered as two of only three items about war mobilization. The post-war section is short on detail or guidance for teachers. The section on the recent past (since 1970) is an even more inadequate list of decontextualized points.

By the time students reach the high school curriculum, the Arizona standards expect them to have acquired sufficient skill to formulate questions based upon historical study and research. In order to achieve that advanced level of historical analysis, students are expected to be able to: evaluate primary and secondary sources for their main points, purpose, and perspective; distinguish between facts, opinions, and different points of view on the same historical event; and assess credibility and validity. Mastering such skills is a worthy goal. But Arizona’s presentation of U.S. history must be made considerably more logical and sequential before students can realistically be expected to understand it—let alone to analyze it to the degree that the high school standards purport to require.

## Content and Rigor Conclusion

Arizona’s U.S. history outline is overly broad and incomplete; it leaves out too much specific content, and some included content is undermined by an ideological tilt. The substantive rigor and progressive degree of sophistication, which should be apparent as students move from the early grades into high school, is often unclear. These problems weaken much of the content that is present. As such, Arizona earns a four out of seven for Content and Rigor. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

## Clarity and Specificity Conclusion

The scope and sequence of the historical material is often muddled and difficult to follow. The chronological periods covered in each grade jump about bizarrely—eras appear, are skipped, and are repeated from grade to grade with little historical logic or progressive sequence. Students will have difficulty developing a clear picture of America’s historical development. The actual content—especially in early grades—is reasonably specific despite the poor organization. But the standards’ prose tends too often toward social studies jargon. The flawed historical outline, weighed down by inadequate clarity or sequence, earns the state a one out of three for Clarity and Specificity. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

# ARKANSAS • U.S. HISTORY



GRADE

**D**

SCORES

Content and Rigor 3/7  
Clarity and Specificity 1/3

TOTAL SCORE

**4/10**

## Overview

Arkansas's standards outline some essential U.S. history content, but significant gaps and a confusing thematic arrangement undermine any sense of chronological coherence or historical development.

## Goals and Organization

Arkansas's K–8 social studies framework is divided into four overarching strands: geography, civics, history, and economics. Each strand is then broken into “standards.” The K–8 history strand's single standard (also labeled “history”) is broken into thematic sub-units—continuity and change; conflict and consensus; movement; cultural diversity and uniformity; and regionalism and nationalism—each of which is then provided with broad grade-level content expectations.

A single document, titled *American History (United States History) Social Studies Curriculum Framework*, follows and is evidently meant for the high school level (though the document does not specify this). This course is divided into a series of chronological strands, as opposed to the K–8 subject strands. Each such chronological strand is then sub-divided into thematic standards, which provide course-specific content expectations.

From Kindergarten through third grade, the content expectations introduce national/state holidays and symbols—but these are repeated nearly verbatim in several grades, making year-by-year development unclear. Arkansas history is introduced in fourth grade. The fifth-grade materials are intended as an introduction to U.S. history though the American Revolution, with sixth grade picking up from there and continuing to the present. The content outline is, however, split among the purely thematic sub-headings described above, making it difficult to discern the chronological scope of each grade-level course.

The American History (United States History) course runs from pre-settlement to the present.

## Evaluation

Little coherent development or causal understanding of history is possible in the confused, thematically organized morass of Arkansas's social studies standards.

Although generalities repeat from Kindergarten through third grade, specific historical references begin to appear in the fourth-grade Arkansas history course. The content expectations for fifth and sixth grades mention various issues, persons, and events in U.S. history—but teachers and students are given only decontextualized fragments rather than a coherent outline or overview. The content expectations are usually just brief

### ✓ DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

**Social Studies Curriculum Framework, Grades K–8, U.S. history segments (2006)**

**Accessed from:**

[http://arkansased.org/educators/pdf/soc\\_studies\\_k-8\\_051308.pdf](http://arkansased.org/educators/pdf/soc_studies_k-8_051308.pdf)

**American History (United States History) Social Studies Curriculum Framework (2006)**

**Accessed from:**

[http://arkansased.org/educators/pdf/amer\\_hist\\_2006.pdf](http://arkansased.org/educators/pdf/amer_hist_2006.pdf)

lists of events or issues with no context or explanation, or unhelpful directives to “understand” whole eras (e.g., “Explain the political viewpoints of *Patriots* and *Loyalists* during the Revolutionary period” [fifth grade]).

The fifth-grade history strand opens with the “continuity and change” sub-theme: This briefly mentions European exploration and colonization, the role of colonial legislatures and town meetings, important people and events in early Arkansas, the Industrial Revolution, and a string of random nineteenth-century names. (These start with Frederick Douglass—which is misspelled “Douglas”; elsewhere, *Plessy v. Ferguson* is misspelled “Plessey,” even as it is thrust together with *Brown v. Board of Education* in total disregard for chronology.) The next sub-theme, “conflict and consensus,” jumps back to European/Native American interaction, colonial settlement and leaders (with another list of scattered names), and the impact of slavery, before suddenly moving to the American Revolution. The “movement” section then skips back to the early colonies before abruptly leapfrogging to nineteenth-century expansion.

The same pattern holds for the other sub-themes, and also for the sixth-grade U.S. history course—which opens with Reconstruction, moves to twentieth-century technology, then to the Great Depression, back to the women’s suffrage movement, then on to the Allied/Axis powers, late twentieth-century technology, and the space program. After all of this, the next sub-theme jumps back to the Battle of the Little Bighorn, the Spanish American War, and so forth.

To make matters worse, the Declaration of Independence, Articles of Confederation, and Bill of Rights appear only under civics, not history.

Much is omitted altogether. Andrew Jackson and Jacksonian democracy are nowhere to be found. (The Trail of Tears does make it in under “movement,” though without any reference to Jackson or his era.) The Missouri Compromise is mentioned, but not the nullification crisis or the Compromise of 1850. Robert E. Lee appears, but not Jefferson Davis. The *Dred Scott* decision is covered, but not *Marbury v. Madison*.

The final U.S. history course—clearly, though not explicitly, aimed at the high school level—seems more promising at first glance. The introduction states that “American History (United States History) examines time periods from the first European explorations of the Americas to present day,” covering “political, military, scientific, economic, and social developments,” allowing students to “analyze and interpret a variety of historical resources and use primary and secondary sources, maps, and pictorial and graphic evidence of historical events.”

In reality, however, the framework’s historical outline is so basic—pushing quickly through what it terms the “Early United States” to Reconstruction, Industrialization, Populism, Imperialism, Progressivism, World in Conflict, and the Contemporary United States—that one could drive an eighteen-wheeler through its substantive gaps.

And, despite an overall chronological arrangement, the thematic sub-headings undermine chronological and historical logic. The Early United States strand is split into standards on migration patterns, government, and war. Thus early exploration and settlement are grouped with Manifest Destiny and nineteenth-century western expansion. Likewise, the American Revolution, Mexican War, and Civil War are thrust together into a single unit. This is historical nonsense; these wars were the products of vastly different issues and contexts and cannot be understood together simply because they were all wars. No details are provided about any of them. Students are simply told to evaluate the “political, social, geographic and economic... causes and effects” of each. The War of 1812 is not even included in the section, but instead appears in a short list of the consequences of Manifest Destiny under “migration patterns.”

Sadly, this chaotic disarray permeates the entire document. The 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* segregation decision (now spelled correctly) is placed in the Reconstruction section rather than the segment on the late nineteenth century—indeed, it appears *before* the 1876 election and the Compromise of 1877. In the section on Progressivism, reform efforts are divorced from Populism and the workers’ movement—which are mentioned earlier in a section on industrialism. Incredibly, the women’s movement of the 1840s suddenly pops up amidst the Progressive reforms—lumped together with other women’s efforts leading up to the nineteenth amendment.

And again, much history is omitted. Andrew Jackson is still missing, as are any details about the Civil War—even Lincoln fails to appear. Later periods are better, but still full of holes. The section on World War II discusses domestic racial conflicts, yet fascism and Hitler are never mentioned. Indeed, *Europe* is never mentioned—nor is any specific event save Japanese internment and the release of the atomic bomb. McCarthyism is raised without discussing Communism. The civil rights movement is reduced to a mere list of minority groups. An item on “global conflicts” lumps together the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and the Gulf War.

The document’s fragmented coverage is highlighted by its glossary, a list of random terms that happen to be mentioned in the standards. Why “nativism,” but not “sectionalism”? Why Watergate, but not Teapot Dome? Why “Exodusters,” but

not “Carpetbaggers”? Why “Big Stick Diplomacy,” but not the Monroe Doctrine? Why the “Roosevelt Corollary,” but not the “Good Neighbor Policy”?

## **Content and Rigor Conclusion**

Arkansas’s social studies standards are not entirely lacking in content; despite egregious gaps, a fair amount of historical material is at least mentioned. But its zealously thematic social studies methodology is inevitably scattershot and fragmented, ripping content out of context. Teachers and students are given scant guidance on historical development or the connections among events; there is neither helpful explanation, nor a coherent outline on which to structure a course. In light of its disorganization, Arkansas earns a three out of seven for Content and Rigor. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

## **Clarity and Specificity Conclusion**

The same organizational failings that undermine the standards’ content and rigor weaken its clarity and specificity. The scope and coverage of content knowledge are inadequate, listing decontextualized shards of material without meaningful detail, connection, context, or explanation. Course sequence and final expectations, likewise, cannot be clear when the content is so randomly “organized”: The actual grade-by-grade sequence is barely spelled out. Arkansas therefore earns only a one out of three for Clarity and Specificity. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

# CALIFORNIA • U.S. HISTORY



GRADE

**A-**

SCORES

Content and Rigor **6/7**  
Clarity and Specificity **3/3**

TOTAL SCORE

**9/10**

## Overview

California's U.S. history standards focus squarely on *history* (not on social studies theory or methodology), emphasizing context, comprehension, and chronological coherence. Unfortunately, the state's otherwise excellent guidelines are weakened by the decision to offer U.S. history as a single chronological sequence split across fifth, eighth, and eleventh grades. This means that key aspects of early American history are only addressed in elementary school and never revisited with greater depth or sophistication in high school.

## Goals and Organization

Following extensive introductory explanations of the state's educational goals, California's *History-Social Science Framework* offers detailed content outlines for every grade, K–12. Each grade-level section opens with its own ample introduction, summarizing the historical content to be covered in that year's curriculum, explaining key themes and ideas, and specifying texts that should be read and discussed in class. Each introduction is followed by a detailed historical outline for that year's course content; these outlines focus purely on historical facts and development, and *do not* divide content into thematic strands—although there is a separate U.S. government course in twelfth grade. (The outlines are also published separately as the *Content Standards*.)

From Kindergarten through third grade, basic concepts of chronology, change, context, and famous people are introduced; fourth grade focuses on California history.

As in a number of other states, California offers U.S. history as a once-through chronological sequence, divided over several grades. American history begins in fifth grade, covering the pre-Columbian era to 1789, briefly summarizing events up to 1850. The sequence resumes in eighth grade, exploring the period from 1789 to the late nineteenth century (following a short review of events preceding the founding of the nation). The American history curriculum concludes in eleventh grade, covering the period from 1900 to the present (following a brief review of the nation's beginnings through the industrial transformation of the late nineteenth century).

## Evaluation

California has put a great deal of time, expertise, and resources into producing its U.S. history framework, showing admirable commitment to substance and content.

The 249-page standards document (which includes both U.S. and world history) provides teachers with meaningful guidance on the specific history that should be taught and

### DOCUMENTS REVIEWED<sup>1</sup>

**History-Social Science Framework for California Public Schools: Kindergarten Through Grade 12, U.S. history segments (2005)**

**Accessed from:**

<http://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/documents/histsocsciframe.pdf>

**History-Social Science Content Standards, U.S. history segments (1998)**

**Accessed from:**

<http://www.cde.ca.gov/be/st/ss/documents/histsocscistnd.pdf>

<sup>1</sup> California adopted draft 2010 history/social studies standards in July 2009. Later that month, the state suspended the adoption and implementation process of these new standards until the 2013–2014 school year. This long-delayed implementation raises serious questions about whether the new standards will ever be used—and whether they will be used in their current form. Thus, the established standards were reviewed here.

learned by twelfth grade. At the same time, the framework is built on a solid foundation of organizational assumptions.

The document explicitly aims to be “centered in the chronological study of history,” emphasizing “the importance of history as a story well-told.” It stresses the importance of studying major historical events and periods in proper depth; proposes a sequential curriculum in which knowledge and understanding are systematically built up; incorporates multicultural perspectives; encourages the development of civic and democratic values and the study of the principles in the Constitution and Bill of Rights; encourages teachers to present controversial issues honestly and accurately in historical context; acknowledges the importance of religion throughout human history; and encourages students to master critical thinking based on solid historical evidence.

There is, however, one significant flaw: the state’s decision to treat the U.S. history curriculum as a once-through sequence split over three grades. The capacity for historical understanding changes dramatically between fifth and eleventh grades. The early grades should not be treated as intellectually equivalent to high school, yet early American history is taught *only* in fifth grade. Despite limited recapitulation in the later grades, much of the substance of pre–1789 U.S. history is still taught only when children are too young to consider it with genuine sophistication.

Nonetheless, the framework’s historical content is frequently impressive. Throughout, the grade-level introductions—which are remarkably clear, solid, and free of jargon—lay out key interpretive themes and strategies for teaching each period. And unlike many other states, California recognizes that thematic interpretation requires solid chronological information. Thus, the introductory overviews are followed by factual outlines, laying out the actual historical data on which interpretation may be built.

The introductory material in fifth grade, for instance, encourages a balanced approach, noting the perspectives of different groups in colonial America (Europeans, Native Americans, Africans, etc.) without being tendentious or presentistic—that is, without judging the past through the lens of today’s values, standards, and norms. The English colonies are even explicitly identified as the essential core in the development of the United States—which is somewhat unusual these days.

Still, some selective omissions leave students with an incomplete picture of the way history unfolded. Students are told, for example, that African slaves were “stolen from their families,” without explaining that they were stolen by Africans

who sold them to Europeans and Americans—a distortion by omission that is, unfortunately, rather widespread.

In addition, the rigor of the standards is sometimes inappropriate to the grade level. It is suggested, for example, that students read excerpts from legal statutes and political speeches. Though these goals are praiseworthy in the abstract, it is unrealistic to expect most fifth graders to read and comprehend such complex texts.

The framework properly emphasizes the significance of American liberty rather than slavery, explaining that the inherent contradiction created new challenges to slavery during the Revolutionary period and after. Some all-too-often neglected events, key to the development of American democracy, are thus included, such as the writing of state constitutions, which embodied many Revolutionary ideas and served as models for the federal Constitution. Yet there are still important omissions. The otherwise sound introduction to the American Revolution begins with the Stamp Act but ignores the French and Indian War, which created the context for Britain’s new imperial policy. And the Marshall Court is relegated to the separate twelfth-grade U.S. government course, not mentioned in the main U.S. history outline.

Eighth grade (after a too-brief recapitulation of material from fifth grade) covers most key issues from 1789 to the late nineteenth century (though immigration and nativism are oddly ignored). Primary documents are again introduced—far more appropriately at this level. The crucial themes of the Civil War and Reconstruction are briefly but cogently discussed (Andrew Johnson’s impeachment, curiously missing from the standards themselves, is mentioned in the grade’s textual introduction), as are the social changes and pressures of the Gilded Age.

The eleventh-grade course gives students their only opportunity to study twentieth-century America. On the whole, the material is thorough and balanced, though the thin coverage of Populism (briefly mentioned in eighth grade) seems curious. Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal are not uncritically hailed, as has often been the case since the 1950s, and the opposition to and controversy about Roosevelt’s policies are discussed briefly but intelligently. The section on World War II emphasizes the threats of totalitarianism and dictatorship—Stalin’s as well as those of Nazi fascism and Japanese militarism. Unusually, the course urges balanced perspectives on the decision to use the atomic bomb in 1945. The Japanese internment is discussed somewhat more problematically; students are directed to analyze it as a human rights violation, thus blurring the distinction between understanding an event in historical context as opposed to endorsing it today. On the other hand, the discussion of the origins of the Cold War

stresses Soviet human-rights abuses and places McCarthyism in the context of the threatening “spread of international communism.”

## Content and Rigor Conclusion

Despite minor gaps, the California framework identifies and rigorously covers most key issues, events, and themes in U.S. history. It is particularly important to emphasize that these are *history* standards, rejecting the model of social studies standards that arbitrarily splice and cram content into a series of ahistorical strands and topics.

The unusually high level of rigor in California’s fifth-grade study of early American history is, however, likely to have only limited impact, as this crucial material is not covered again in later grades. Recapitulation of earlier material, albeit limited, is at least required in later grades; many other states that follow a similar sequence specify no recapitulation whatever. On balance, the overall care and quality evident in the standards remain impressive despite these flaws, and earn the state a six out of seven for Content and Rigor. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

## Clarity and Specificity Conclusion

California teachers and students can rely upon these standards for solid and clear guidance on the curriculum content expected at a particular grade level. In addition, the standards include a scope and sequence that keep history coherent—despite the lamentable decision to split American history into a single, one-time-only progression running from elementary to high school levels. The prose is quite readable and free of the idiosyncratic jargon of social studies.

Inevitably—given California’s massive population, economy, and influence—this state’s standards are often regarded as models to be emulated by the rest of the nation’s public-school systems. And indeed, despite the unfortunate grade sequence, most states would be well-advised to consult the efforts of California, a state that has been at the forefront of the history-standards movement for decades. These admirably transparent and comprehensible standards earn a three out of three for Clarity and Specificity. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

# COLORADO • U.S. HISTORY

GRADE

**F**

SCORES

Content and Rigor 0/7  
Clarity and Specificity 0/3

TOTAL SCORE

**0/10**

## Overview

The 2009 Colorado social studies standards, we are told, were “designed for clarity, rigor, and coherence,” aiming for “fewer, higher and clearer standards.” The result is meant to be “a vision” of “what all students should know and be able to do at each grade level through eighth, and then through high school.” Unfortunately, thematic abstractions dominate the standards—to the near-total exclusion of historical or chronological coherence, obscuring what limited content there is in a confused tangle of categories, sub-categories, and jargon.

## Goals and Organization

Colorado’s K–12 *Academic Standards* for social studies are divided into four strands—history, geography, economics, and civics—that are common to all grades. Within each strand, the state provides grade-level expectations for individual grades from K–8, and for high school (grades 9–12) as a block. Each such expectation consists of a thematic heading—labeled “concepts and skills students master”—laying out broad conceptual themes to be covered. For example, one eighth-grade history grade-level expectation directs students to “formulate appropriate hypotheses about United States history based on a variety of historical sources and perspectives.”

The state then provides a series of “evidence outcomes” for each concepts and skills heading. These are thematic summary statements of knowledge that students must master as well as “21st century skills and readiness competencies.” The latter are comprised of “inquiry questions” (more specific queries about the content), “relevance and application” points (drawing parallels between the content and current issues) and, in the history strand, “nature of history” points (regarding the nature of historical study).

This jargon-laden snarl of nested categories severely fragments any historical content, making chronological presentation impossible. With content summaries so broad, general, and disorganized, even the basic scope of each year’s course can be difficult to discern.

At the early elementary level, the expectations address basic concepts of chronology and family/cultural traditions in first grade; introduce historical sources in second grade; discuss distinctions between historical fact and fiction in third grade; and introduce Colorado history in fourth grade.

Fifth grade is meant to cover the period from 1491 to the post–Revolutionary era. Eighth grade is meant to cover the period from the American Revolution to Reconstruction. At the high school level, there is a nominal focus on events from Reconstruction to the present.

## ✓ DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

**Colorado Academic Standards, Social Studies, U.S. history segments (2009)**

**Accessed from:**

[http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdeassess/UAS/AdoptedAcademicStandards/Social\\_Studies\\_Adopted\\_12.10.09.pdf](http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdeassess/UAS/AdoptedAcademicStandards/Social_Studies_Adopted_12.10.09.pdf)

## Evaluation

According to the state’s social studies standards, Colorado students are expected to graduate with the skills to understand “how people view, construct and interpret history” and grasp “key historical periods and patterns of change over time within and across nations and cultures.”

Unfortunately, concepts and skills must be matched with content and substance if genuine historical clarity and rigor are to be achieved. Yet Colorado seems much more interested in abstract goals than specific substance.

At the early elementary level, the grade-level expectations in U.S. history comprise entirely conventional explorations of basic concepts such as chronology and sources. In fifth grade, according to the expectations’ concepts and skills headings, students are to “analyze historical sources from multiple points of view to develop an understanding of historical context,” applying these skills to “historical eras, individuals, groups, ideas, and themes in North America from 1491 through the founding of the United States government.” By eighth grade, they should be able to “formulate appropriate hypotheses about United States history based on a variety of historical sources and perspectives,” focusing on the period from the American Revolution to Reconstruction. In high school, the concepts and skills headings become so abstract that no specific historical era is even mentioned.

The evidence outcomes within each grade-level expectation are presumably meant to expand upon these broad generalizations and lay out the specific course content, yet they fail to provide much more in the way of content guidance. Some evidence outcomes do make sporadic reference to historical events (the American Revolution, Reconstruction, etc.), but these are tossed out without adequate context or explanation and with no suggestion of an actual overview or outline.

High school evidence outcomes, for example, direct students to “investigate causes and effects of significant events in United States history,” with “topics to include but not limited to WWI, Great Depression, [and the] Cold War.” Or to “analyze the complexity of events in United States history,” with “topics to include but not limited to the suffrage movement and the Civil Rights Movement.” Eighth-grade evidence outcomes direct students to “determine and explain the historical context of key people and events from the origins of the American Revolution through Reconstruction including the examination of different perspectives.” Fourth graders are to construct “a timeline of Colorado history with events in United States and world history.” And so forth.

The inquiry questions, relevance and application, and nature of history points are meant to expand upon these evidence outcomes (and, in the process, to develop “21st century skills

and readiness competencies”—whatever those might be). But, like the evidence outcomes themselves, all content in these categories remains abstract, overly general, and substance-free.

For example, fifth graders are told to explain, “Why is [sic] important to understand the historical context of events?”; or “How did historical events and individuals contribute to diversity in the United States?” Eighth graders are to consider, “How have the basic values and principles of American democracy changed over time and in what ways have they been preserved?” And, incredibly, high school students are asked: “What impact have individuals had on history?”

The closest we come to history in the fifth-grade inquiry questions are such vague queries as: “How might history be different without the Declaration of Independence?” and “To what extent did individuals and their ideas contribute to the foundation of the United States government?” Eighth grade questions are equally abstract, such as, “To what extent was the Civil War an extension of the American Revolution?” At the high school level, there are no historically specific “questions” at all.

The standards never offer the slightest suggestion of outline, explanation, context, or factual substance. Actual historical people, details and events never appear—just bits of historical flotsam in a maelstrom of social studies “concepts.”

## Content and Rigor Conclusion

Colorado’s K–12 *Academic Standards* in social studies provide virtually no subject-specific content in U.S. history. There is hardly anything in U.S. history that teachers are *specifically required to know or to teach* at any particular grade level. A complete lack of specific content means that substantive rigor cannot be identified, measured, or evaluated. Even a few vague and brief references to specific eras or concepts cannot raise the score above a zero out of seven for Content and Rigor. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

## Clarity and Specificity Conclusion

Colorado teachers seeking specific guidance about grade-level knowledge and skills in U.S. history will not find it in these standards. The document is completely lacking in specifics, the language and historical questions are substantively vacuous, and scope and sequence are essentially an illusion. Teachers are vaguely guided to teach particular eras in particular years, but receive no details about what to include or how to structure a course. The reader is left with almost a “through the looking glass” feeling about the entire undertaking. The Colorado standards began by claiming “change is necessary” as their guiding principle. And until there is substantial change, Colorado cannot earn more than a zero out of three for Clarity and Specificity. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

# CONNECTICUT • U.S. HISTORY



GRADE

**F**

SCORES

Content and Rigor 1/7  
Clarity and Specificity 0/3

TOTAL SCORE

**1/10**

## Overview

Connecticut's unofficially adopted social studies standards, insofar as they cover U.S. history at all, offer isolated historical scraps which are devoid of context, explanation, or meaning. And even these arbitrary thematic shards are merely "suggested" to teachers, not required.

## Goals and Organization

Connecticut's framework is divided into three standards: content knowledge, history/social studies literacy, and application. Each standard is subdivided into strands that are common across all grade levels. The content knowledge standard is divided into thirteen strands, including U.S. history, Connecticut history, world history, geography, and various aspects of environment, migration, government, citizenship, and economics. The other two standards are divided into eight more strands between them, focused on research, writing, and presentation skills.

A chart supplies each strand with grade-level expectations for individual grades from pre-Kindergarten through eighth grade, and for high school (grades 9–12) as a block. Specific historical examples are offered for some expectations, but these are merely "suggested," showing "possible approaches" for classroom use.

The Connecticut framework offers "Suggestions for Content to Address Grade-Level Expectations by Grade," which lays out a proposed grade-by-grade sequence. Pre-Kindergarten through second grade focus on concepts of community, chronology, and human interdependence; third grade focuses on the local town, and fourth grade on Connecticut history.

Fifth grade turns to U.S. history, covering the period through the American Revolution and the Constitution. Eighth grade deals with the period from the Constitution "through the 19th century," and high school covers the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, with "review of earlier events where necessary to provide appropriate background and context." Only the high school course is listed as "required." At other grade levels, teachers need only ensure "that social studies instruction is an integral component of instruction."

## Evaluation

Connecticut's social studies framework claims to enable "teachers to understand what students should know and be able to do from prekindergarten through high school." The emphasis throughout, however, is on social studies skills and concepts rather than on specific historical content.

### DOCUMENTS REVIEWED<sup>1</sup>

**Connecticut Social Studies Curriculum Framework. Grades K–12, U.S. history segments (interim draft, October 2009)**

**Accessed from:**

[http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/curriculum/socialstudies/ssfrmwk\\_10-6-09.pdf](http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/curriculum/socialstudies/ssfrmwk_10-6-09.pdf)

<sup>1</sup> Due to staff retirements and budget issues, Connecticut's draft framework has not been subject to final review or formal adoption. However, teachers have been advised to follow the draft for the present, and it is therefore being used in state schools.

The framework also aims to help “students build empathetic awareness” about historical and contemporary issues: Classes are to integrate “current events” in order “to provide opportunities for responsible student engagement with real problems in the school, community, and the world around them.” Connecticut students, as a result, will learn to make “connections between past and present and between their social studies curriculum and the everyday world.”

Thus, from the start, social studies theory and personal, present-day relevance are stressed over specific historical knowledge. And, indeed, specific historical content appears in the standards almost as an afterthought: History is presented as a tool for understanding social studies, rather than vice versa.

Teachers are asked to emphasize “local history” and to make progressively more “extensive” use of primary sources. But what those primary sources might be, or what content each course should address, is left essentially undefined. Since Connecticut’s grade-level topics are merely “suggested” before the “required” modern U.S. history course in high school, teachers may even decide to focus on different content altogether, creating little confidence that students across the state will be exposed to a consistent, comprehensive, and rigorous U.S. history curriculum.

The meager U.S. history content that does appear is mostly placed in the first strand of the content knowledge standard—for example, “demonstrate an understanding of significant events and themes in U.S. history.” But, overall, the content knowledge standard is inappropriately named; it includes no historical events or concepts, no chronology or interconnection—just overbroad concepts and random examples divorced from any context or coherence.

Second graders, for example, are asked to “explain the contributions of historical figures.” The diversity-driven examples include: “George Washington, Harriet Tubman, Sacagawea, Squanto, Abraham Lincoln, César Chávez, Martin Luther King, Jr., [and] Rosa Parks.” Third graders are to “explain the significance of events surrounding historical figures”—and the suggested examples consist of the *same list* of random names.

The fifth-grade materials, which are supposed to introduce the serious study of U.S. history, offer just five grade-level expectations in the U.S. history strand. Students might, for example, “explain how specific individuals and their ideas and beliefs influenced U.S. history,” the random examples being “John Smith, Anne Hutchinson, Uncas, [and] Benjamin Franklin.” Or they could “compare and contrast the economic, political, and/or religious differences that contributed to conflicts (e.g., French and Indian Wars [*sic*], American

Revolution).” Additional items mention how “conflicts have been resolved through compromise” (such as “U.S. Constitution, Northwest Ordinance”), how “individual events... contributed to the American Revolution” (no examples given), and “the significance of the results” of the Constitutional Convention (no examples given). Colonial settlement and relations with Britain are tossed into the world history strand, also without any specifics. The other eleven content strands offer little more than general, conceptual points about the role of economics and geography.

In eighth grade, the U.S. history strand now receives nine grade-level expectations. For instance, students are again to describe “conflicts that have been resolved through compromise.” The bizarre example highlights “compromises over slavery”—a textbook example of a conflict that was *not* resolved through compromise, as the Civil War would seem to indicate. Other expectations briefly mention reform movements and the arts. One, with breathtaking insouciance, expects students to “explain how specific individuals and their ideas and beliefs influenced U.S. history”—with no examples offered. Pupils might then compare and contrast the causes and effects of the American Revolution and Civil War, the “precedents established during the Federalist era” (mentioned *after* the Civil War), and westward expansion and its impact on Native Americans—before jumping back to “the compromises made at the Constitutional Convention.” The world history strand adds scattered references to the slave trade and foreign relations.

High school students—who receive no fewer than twelve expectations in the U.S. history strand—might examine migration, “citizens’ rights” (e.g., Palmer Raids, struggle for civil rights, women’s rights movement, [and the] Patriot Act”), the changing role of the United States in the world, the developing American economy, and the impact of natural resources. They might also examine “various American beliefs, values and political ideologies (e.g., political parties, nativism, Scopes trial, [and] McCarthyism),” along with nationalism, sectionalism, the “evolving heterogeneity of American society,” technology, the arts, and, again, the impact of “significant individuals” (the rather odd list for the twentieth and twenty-first centuries is as follows: “Malcolm X, Susan B. Anthony, Eleanor Roosevelt, Martin Luther King Jr., [and] Ronald Reagan”).

The remaining standards—“history/social studies literacy” and “application”—are ostensibly included to outline the skills that students must master to critically analyze history. The “literacy” standard, for example, focuses on the ability to read and interpret maps and sources, create written work (including blogs and web pages), and engage in discussion. The “application” standard wishes students to understand and evaluate historical interpretations, analyze “alternative points

of view,” and apply social studies concepts to “contemporary problems” and their solutions. All such directives are purely theoretical and non-specific (e.g., “detect bias in data presented in various forms”). How are students to analyze, understand, evaluate, or apply abstract concepts if they lack the actual historical knowledge required to analyze, understand, or evaluate?

## Content and Rigor Conclusion

Connecticut’s social studies frameworks are relentlessly focused on social studies concepts and priorities. Historical content is, at best, an afterthought. There is no meaningful outline, explanation, or guideline explaining what teachers are to teach or students are to learn. Instead, there is a series of broad, theoretical themes with scattershot, decontextualized, and often tendentious (if not irrational) examples tied to arbitrary and artificial thematic subdivisions. More than twenty strands merely direct students to analyze whatever content teachers happen to introduce. Key concepts and events receive no coverage or emphasis. Personal and contemporary “relevance” are constantly stressed over historical understanding. Grade-level appropriateness is moot, since there is no measurable rigor at any level. Limited specifics, however random, earn Connecticut’s standards a one out of seven for Content and Rigor. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

## Clarity and Specificity Conclusion

Connecticut’s history standards barely outline curricular scope. A thin sequence is defined—vaguely identified eras are assigned to individual grades—but even that is merely a “suggestion.” Students, teachers, and parents are given virtually no guidance as to what students should actually learn—they are only told what conceptual skills they should master, to be applied to whatever content their teachers select. Detail is fragmentary at best, and far more often absent entirely. The framework reviewed, though already in use in schools, is only a draft: Parents should demand drastic changes before this self-described “comprehensive document,” that purportedly “assists teachers in teaching content,” is officially adopted. The standards merit a zero out of three for Clarity and Specificity. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

# DELAWARE • U.S. HISTORY



GRADE

**F**

SCORES

Content and Rigor 0/7  
Clarity and Specificity 0/3

TOTAL SCORE

**0/10**

## Overview

Delaware’s social studies standards are devoid of any historical content or substance. In fact, the state openly dismisses the importance of essential content: With abstractions and concepts at the fore, students “will not be expected to recall any particular *specific* event or person in history.” It is rare, even in the world of social studies—where themes and categories are routinely preferred over content and chronology—to see standards that so blatantly and complacently reject the need for core historical content.

## Goals and Organization

Delaware’s social studies standards are divided into four strands: geography, civics, economics, and history. The five-page section for the history strand is divided into four standards, directing students to “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).” For each standard, largely abstract statements of target learning goals are laid out for grade blocks K–3, 4–5, 6–8, and 9–12.

The separate *Social Studies Clarifications* documents offer further discussion of each of the four strands. The section “clarifying” the history strand provides a discussion of teaching theory, expanding upon the conceptual themes outlined in the history standards.

The only direct references to course scope appear under the so-called “content” standard: From Kindergarten through third grade, students are to learn—for U.S. and Delaware history—basic ideas about diversity, immigrants, communities, and “important people in our past,” though none are specifically named. In grades six through eight, where U.S. history is meant to begin, the only content specified is a list of periods to be learned: Three Worlds Meet (Beginnings to 1620), Colonization and Settlement (1585–1763), and so forth to the Civil War. For grades nine through twelve, teachers are given a similar list running from Reconstruction to the present.

## Evaluation

Each page of Delaware’s history standards is headed with a clear and succinct statement on the nature and value of historical study, emphasizing change and interaction over time, the importance of gathering and interpreting data, and the importance of chronology and of historical cause-and-effect.

### ✓ DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

#### Delaware Social Studies Prioritized Standards (1995, updated 2008)

##### Accessed from:

[http://www.doe.k12.de.us/infosuites/staff/ci/content\\_areas/socialstudies.shtml](http://www.doe.k12.de.us/infosuites/staff/ci/content_areas/socialstudies.shtml)

#### Social Studies Clarifications, U.S. history segments (2010)

##### Accessed from:

[http://www.doe.k12.de.us/infosuites/staff/ci/content\\_areas/socialstudies.shtml](http://www.doe.k12.de.us/infosuites/staff/ci/content_areas/socialstudies.shtml)

Yet the documents that follow dismiss any core or common *substance* that students must master in order to achieve such aims. It is fitting that content is the *last* of Delaware’s four standards—for content is entirely missing throughout, even in the standard *labeled* “content.” The standards’ introductory emphasis on the importance of “chronologies” and “cause-and-effect relationships among...events” becomes ironic, as only the most basic chronology is specified, and “events” are completely absent.

In the first three standards, only a single sentence tries to explain the target achievements for each grade block; all of these are abstract, and most are extremely similar across grades. Under chronology, for example, students in fourth and fifth grades are to “study historical events and persons within a given time-frame in order to create a chronology and identify related cause-and-effect factors.” In grades six through eight, they are to “examine historical materials relating to a particular region, society, or theme; analyze change over time, and make logical inferences concerning cause and effect.” In grades nine through twelve, they are to “analyze historical materials to trace the development of an idea or trend across space or over a prolonged period of time in order to explain patterns of historical continuity and change.”

Similar items under “analysis” direct students—again in wholly abstract terms—to do research and study sources; under “interpretation,” they are to study and “compare competing historical narratives.” Under “content,” there is a bare-bones list of eras to be covered—and that, so far as a U.S. history curriculum goes, is it. In short, Delaware’s standards expect students to master chronology, analysis, and interpretation *before* they have built a solid foundation of historical knowledge.

The *Clarifications* document for teachers adds *no meaningful history at all*. The clarification they offer is of theory, not content. This supplement does, however, provide a remarkably honest and candid restatement of the classic, social studies “how-to-learn not what-to-learn” mentality.

For example, even though the first history standard focuses on chronology, we are told that “as a concept, chronology does not mean exact dates, overly detailed timelines, and long exercises putting events in order. Instead, it means understanding (why and how) that one event may or may not lead to subsequent events.” There is no explanation of how teachers and students can understand how one event leads to subsequent events if they have no shared knowledge of those specific events.

Indeed, the *Clarifications* further challenge the basic notion of historical fact: “Nothing changes as much as history, because history is not what happened but what historians say

happened...[since] each historian also comes from a societal and personal background and lives in a particular time and place.” In short, historical content is illusory, since history itself is little more than an artificial construct. In a comic-book-level parroting of postmodernist and deconstructionist dogma, the *Clarifications* admonish teachers: “Remember, *history does not exist* until the historian looks at the sources and decides what is important and therefore what is history” (emphasis added).

Rather than encouraging a balanced and nuanced understanding of the past, Delaware overtly endorses a surrender to relativism and an abandonment of any factual grounding.

Of course, if historical facts cannot be defined, neither can a history curriculum. Students, Delaware assures us, “must know history”—but they “will not be expected to recall any particular *specific* event or person in history.” This rejection of definable substance and content could hardly be more explicit: “A student who is answering a question must know something to use to argue with. But, there is no list of specific events everyone must know,” no need to include “specific people, laws, events, etc.” in the standards, “because no group of historians will ever agree on the essential and necessary facts that everyone should know.” This, we are told, “does not mean students do not have to know anything. It means that a student is free to use whatever historical knowledge he or she gained in that classroom”—whatever, in short, a given teacher happens to teach.

Indeed, “since it is impossible for a curriculum to cover everything that has happened, as a textbook will try to do,” content decisions are explicitly “left for each district or teacher” to make. Delaware does, however, suggest criteria on which to make choices—and historical coherence is not among them. Content should, rather, be chosen “based on its *relevance to contemporary issues*, its importance, its relationship to the big ideas of social studies, and its transferability” (emphasis added). The “big ideas of social studies” are defined as “chronology in broad outlines, and enough trends in history” to give students “a reservoir of information that they can use” in addressing theoretical questions.

In short, if teacher A thinks George Washington is important to American history, that’s fine. But if teacher B thinks dead generals and presidents are irrelevant to “real” and “relevant” history, that’s fine, too.

## Content and Rigor Conclusion

Delaware’s rejection of specific content in its history standards—beyond a bare list of eras—leaves little to analyze. Worse, the *Clarifications* text specifically insists that all historical

interpretations and approaches are equally valid, thus rejecting even the *concept* of specific substance—a breathtakingly blunt statement of the social studies dogma that has undermined history teaching for decades. There is no content or rigor to assess, leaving the state with an inevitable score of zero out of seven. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

### **Clarity and Specificity Conclusion**

Ironically, Delaware’s standards open with a clear and pithy statement on the value of historical learning. In reality, however, the grade-level course sequence is vague to the point of non-existence; all detail is absent. And since measurable knowledge targets are rejected, there can be no substantive guidance for teachers or students regarding required content knowledge or final assessment skills. Though its renunciation of content is both clear and specific, it earns Delaware a zero out of three for Clarity and Specificity. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

# DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA • U.S. HISTORY

GRADE

**A-**

SCORES

Content and Rigor **6/7**  
Clarity and Specificity **3/3**

TOTAL SCORE

**9/10**

## Overview

By adapting its standards from the admirable content of the California and Massachusetts frameworks, the District of Columbia has produced a set of excellent U.S. history guidelines. There are occasional gaps and shortcomings, some derived from the source states, but the overall quality is exceptional. The District of Columbia offers an approach to crafting rigorous and thorough U.S. history standards that many states would be well advised to follow.

## Goals and Organization

The D.C. standards offer specific curricula for each grade, K–8, and for subject-specific high school courses (world history and geography, U.S. history, U.S. government, and D.C. history and government). A straightforward format is used throughout: Each grade/course is organized in subdivisions, beneath which appear “broad concepts,” followed by grade-specific content expectations. Sample classroom exercises are offered for selected content items. The curriculum is not divided into typical social studies strands; rather, historical material is presented chronologically and analytical categories pertinent to each content item are noted parenthetically (these include geography, economics, politics and government, religious thought and ideas, social impact, military action, and intellectual thought).

The District’s content is derived from California and Massachusetts, but D.C. has also constructed its own grade-level sequence. Chronological concepts, national symbols, holidays, and important individuals are introduced from Kindergarten through second grade. Third grade then offers a basic introduction to local history and geography.

The U.S. history sequence begins with a two-year survey course in fourth and fifth grades, with fourth grade running from pre-settlement to the Constitution, and fifth grade from 1790 to the present. A second two-year survey, which runs from 1600 to 1914, begins in eighth grade. The second course concludes in eleventh grade, reviewing from the colonial period onward, then covering 1877 to the present.

## Evaluation

One purpose of effective state standards is to provide a model for other states and districts. The District of Columbia has, commendably, chosen to adapt its standards “from the highly rated California and Massachusetts curriculum frameworks,” aiming to select “essential topics that build a chronologically organized history...on a solid base of factual knowledge.”

The result is an impressively rigorous and comprehensive set of standards. There are occasional gaps (some originating in the two source states and some introduced in the

### DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

**Learning Standards: Social Studies Pre-K through Grade 8, U.S. history segments (2006)**

**Accessed from:**

<http://dcps.dc.gov/portal/site/DCPS/menuitem.06de50edb2b17a932c69621014f62010?vgnextoid=3e7d112f62c32210VgnVCM100000416f0201RCRD&vgnnextchannel=22aba12cbf242210VgnVCM100000416f0201RCRD>

**Learning Standards: Social Studies High School, U.S. history segments (2006)**

**Accessed from:**

<http://www.dc.gov/DCPS/In+the+Classroom/What+Students+Are+Learning/Learning+Standards+for+High+School+Subjects>

adaptation process) and occasional thematic departures from chronology. But the D.C. standards also supply some material missed in the source states, providing a thorough framework for history education.

The District begins its students' exploration of history in the early grades with conventional coverage of chronological concepts, holidays, symbols, famous individuals, and local history. As noted above, it then offers two full two-year U.S. history courses, one in fourth and fifth grades and the other in eighth and eleventh grades. Fourth grade may be somewhat early to introduce a detailed history curriculum, but the material is all covered again in later grades, and the level of rigor in the early grades does not seem unrealistic.

The fourth- and fifth-grade content outlines are admirable, although they do stress social history and tend to shortchange political history. One suggested fifth-grade classroom exercise deserves particular mention: "Students watch the movie *Glory* and compare its contents to primary source documents" in Colonel Robert Gould Shaw's published letters, and then "discuss Hollywood's depiction of history and how accurate it is." Comparing Hollywood history to the reality of primary documents is a valuable lesson for any informed citizen (though one wonders, given the goriness of the film and complexity of the documents, if this exercise wouldn't be better suited to high school).

In eighth grade, the first part of the second two-year survey, the period prior to the Revolution is covered briefly, but many excellent points are raised. Much of the political history that was missing in the elementary sequence is now included. Issues surrounding the Constitution are given particular emphasis, as are the roots of the Civil War. Yet antebellum nativism does not appear; Andrew Johnson's impeachment is missing; and the Marshall Court and *Marbury v. Madison* are shunted to the separate twelfth-grade U.S. government course (without naming Marshall) and are not mentioned in the main history outline (though, oddly, Marshall and *McCulloch v. Maryland* are mentioned in a suggested eighth-grade classroom exercise on local D.C. history).

The District concludes its second treatment of U.S. history in eleventh grade, recapitulating key ideas back to the colonial period before resuming with 1877 to the present. The District continues to add its own language and examples. For example, Franklin D. Roosevelt's "Black Cabinet," World War II U.S. casualties, the Domino theory, the Dixiecrats, and other specifics (absent in the source states) appear here. Yet the Palmer Raids, which occurred during the Red Scare under Wilson in 1919, are lumped misleadingly with the Republican presidents of the 1920s. Additionally, coverage of the post-

World War II period often favors theme over chronology, and the section on recent events is particularly brief and patchy.

By fusing its two models and adding content of its own, D.C. has—despite some flaws—created a document that is in some ways better than either of its sources.

## Content and Rigor Conclusion

The District of Columbia's content has gaps and shortcomings but the overall level of historical coverage is quite strong. The standards are enhanced by the decision to include two complete U.S. history courses. Rigor is impressive, though not unrealistically so, in fourth and fifth grades and increases substantially in eighth and eleventh grades. Placing both years of the second course in high school would be preferable, but the eleventh-grade course does review much of the important eighth-grade content. Above all, the emphasis throughout is on *history*: historical fact, context, and interpretation, not abstract social studies doctrine or categories. Weighing its occasional flaws against its many impressive virtues, the District of Columbia receives a six out of seven for Content and Rigor. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

## Clarity and Specificity Conclusion

The District of Columbia's *Learning Standards* are admirably straightforward. Sequence is evident and practical; the material to be covered in each grade is always clearly defined and outlined. Detail, despite occasional gaps, is substantial. Content presentation is clear, simple, and readable; social studies charts and jargon are absent. The District's planners have chosen their models well and done their job carefully. Despite occasional flaws, the standards give substantial guidance to teachers in structuring their courses and to students in understanding what they are expected to learn. Many states with weak and substance-thin history standards would be well advised to emulate D.C. and make use of the best state frameworks to construct their own high-quality standards. The District's impressive document receives a three out of three for Clarity and Specificity. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

# FLORIDA • U.S. HISTORY



GRADE

C

SCORES

Content and Rigor 5/7  
Clarity and Specificity 1/3

TOTAL SCORE

6/10

## Overview

Despite an unwieldy and visually confusing presentation, Florida's U.S. history standards offer a competent outline of key issues, events, and themes in American history. While detail is sometimes lacking, the document still offers teachers a useful and fairly comprehensive frame on which to build a course.

## Goals and Organization

Florida's K–8 social studies standards are divided into five strands: American history, world history, geography, economics, and citizenship/government. Each strand is then divided into standards, and finally into grade-specific "performance benchmarks," which are supplied in turn with supporting "remarks/examples." The high school standards are organized similarly, save that a single set of standards is provided for grades 9–12, and a sixth strand (humanities) is added.

The American history strand is divided in the early elementary grades into purely thematic standards. Beginning in fourth grade, these standards constitute a series of thematic and chronological content headings, which grow in number and specificity in later grades.

American history begins in Kindergarten, with basic concepts of chronology, major holidays, famous individuals, and national symbols. In first through third grades, students are introduced to primary and secondary sources, distinguishing fact from fiction, and the achievements of major historical figures. Fourth grade covers Florida history from pre-Columbian beginnings to the present.

The U.S. history curriculum per se begins in fifth grade, which runs from the pre-contact era to the early nineteenth century. A full course in U.S. history is split between eighth grade and high school, with eighth grade running from British settlement to the Civil War, and high school spanning Reconstruction to the present.

## Evaluation

Florida's history standards are presented in a visually confusing and unwieldy chart outlining the strands, standards, and grade-specific benchmarks. Yet nearly hidden within this lengthy and complex presentation is a good deal of solid historical overview.

Coverage from Kindergarten through fourth grade is conventional but competent, introducing fundamental concepts of historical development. The much more ambitious fifth grade course in U.S. history includes pre-Columbian North America, exploration and colonization of North America, the American Revolution, the birth of a new nation, and westward expansion. Though the content outline rarely lists specific details, it

### DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

**Florida Social Studies Standards Report: Benchmarks and Access Points with Remarks, U.S. history segments (2008)**

**Accessed from:**

<http://www.floridastandards.org/Standards/FLStandardSearch.aspx>

offers a solid overview of key issues, themes, and events. It shows little political bias or tendentious distortion, neither overemphasizing politically fashionable groups or themes nor excluding more traditional political history.

More specifics would, however, make these standards significantly stronger. (The motivations of European explorers, to take one example, are listed as a subject without any further explication.) Teachers will certainly need good textbooks to explicate the terms and events listed in the standards. Nonetheless, the standards do provide a coherent outline on which a respectable course could be constructed.

The fifth-grade segment on exploration and colonization outlines the economic, political, and socio-cultural motivation for colonial settlement (examples include Puritans fleeing religious persecution, debtor settlements in Georgia, and the African slave trade); the characteristics of New England, Middle, and Southern colonies (colonial governments, geographic differences, resources, economic systems, occupations, religions, and social patterns); the political, economic, and social aspects of daily life in the thirteen colonies (town meetings, farming, and education); the importance of the triangular trade linking Africa with the West; and the introduction, impact, and role of slavery in the colonies. Some items are less impressive: The only examples given of “significant individuals responsible for the development of the New England, Middle, and Southern colonies” are “William Penn, Pontiac, [and] Oludah Equiano.”

Generally competent outlining continues through the topic of westward expansion, the closing section of the course. Causes and effects of the Louisiana Purchase are mentioned, though not detailed, as are the causes and consequences of the War of 1812, Manifest Destiny and its impact on Native Americans, the Missouri Compromise, and the experiences of western settlers. A substantial level of content is frequently maintained. Yet fifth grade, somewhat oddly, covers only the beginning of U.S. history, before the full two-year U.S. history course begins in eighth grade (except for pre-contact cultures, which are only covered briefly in fifth grade). American history is thus covered one-and-a-half times.

The eighth-grade course discusses historical sources, even introducing students to some basic historical research of their own. Colonial material considered in fifth grade is examined here in greater depth. Still, some items remain disappointingly vague. Such directions as “explain American colonial reaction to British policy from 1763–1774” and “examine the causes, course, and consequences of the American Revolution” are extremely short on specifics.

The course outline remains generally sound and substantive as it moves into the early national period and the nineteenth century. Important political points, often omitted in other states, are included, such as the weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation, the importance of the Washington and John Adams presidencies, the Alien and Sedition Acts, the election of 1800, the rise of political parties, *Marbury v. Madison*, the Embargo Act of 1807, and the entrenchment of slavery, continuing up through the Civil War. Unfortunately, the broadly framed benchmarks sometimes group examples out of logical chronological sequence. For instance, an item on westward expansion runs through the Kansas-Nebraska Act, while later items jump back to the 1804 Haitian revolution, Jacksonian democracy, and Florida statehood.

The high school U.S. history course picks up after the Civil War. High school students are introduced to historical methodology and historiography, and teachers can again turn to a reliable set of content guidelines: Reconstruction and the Thirteenth through Fifteenth Amendments, conflicts among Republicans during Reconstruction, the rise of Jim Crow laws and sharecropping, industrialization and the trusts, social transformation, populism and progressivism, the Spanish American War, and imperialism, among other examples.

The section on the causes and consequences of World War II includes “efforts to expand or contract rights for various groups” and mentions women, African Americans, Japanese Americans, and Hispanic Americans—though it fails to specifically mention the Japanese internment. This is curious, given some states’ almost exclusive focus on the Japanese American internment as *the* feature of the World War II home front.

## Content and Rigor Conclusion

Overall, the level of historical specifics and the generally consistent adherence to chronology provides significant guidance for teachers in structuring a solid American history curriculum. Most key events and themes are touched upon, including some content that is absent from many state standards. Despite occasional thematic departures from chronology and a lack of specific detail in some units, the Florida standards provide solid guidance to teachers and outline much of the essential content that students need to learn to become historically literate. Therefore, Florida standards earn a five out of seven for Content and Rigor. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

## Clarity and Specificity Conclusion

The usability of Florida’s standards is impaired by their visually challenging spreadsheet layout—an unfortunate surrender to social studies jargon that partially obscures content and clarity. Behind the confusing format, a rational scope and structure for each grade is laid out; yet the progression of material from elementary to middle to high school is not entirely sensible. The expectations for student knowledge are clear, and the standards offer a generally competent and useful outline of U.S. history, but there is sometimes a serious lack of detail. Florida’s organizationally flawed and insufficiently specific standards earn a one out of three for Clarity and Specificity. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

# GEORGIA • U.S. HISTORY



GRADE

**B**

SCORES

Content and Rigor **5/7**  
Clarity and Specificity **2/3**

TOTAL SCORE

**7/10**

## Overview

Despite some gaps and omissions—and despite an unnecessarily convoluted arrangement of content—Georgia’s standards outline much of the essential U.S. history material with grade-appropriate depth and rigor. The decision to offer full U.S. history sequences in both elementary and high school is especially noteworthy.

## Goals and Organization

Georgia’s K–8 *Performance Standards for Social Studies* are first divided into four strands, or “understandings”: historical, geographic, government/civic, and economic. Grade-specific standards are then provided for each strand, subdivided by chronological and/or thematic headings. At the high school level, these overlapping “understandings” are abandoned and standards are presented by course for government/civics, geography, U.S. history, and world history, again arranged under chronological and thematic headings.

Kindergarten through third grade introduce basic holidays and national symbols, a sampling of historic Americans, elements of Georgia history, and some of the basics of constitutional government.

The formal U.S. history curriculum begins in fourth grade, covering the two-and-a-half centuries up to 1860. Fifth grade covers the period from 1860 to the present. A second, full U.S. history course appears at the high school level.

## Evaluation

Georgia makes an effort to delineate a substantive U.S. history curriculum, outlining two full courses—one in elementary/middle school and another in high school. There are, however, some problematic gaps in content. And, unfortunately, the splitting of related material among different strands (government/civics material, for instance, frequently bears directly on the historical outline) undermines the clarity and usefulness of the material.

Historical content from Kindergarten through third grade is conventional. Selected bits of history are introduced, including holidays, national symbols, famous individuals (such as: “Benjamin Franklin, inventor/author/statesman”), and elements of local history. A basic introduction to the principles of constitutional government is a welcome feature.

The fourth-grade introduction to pre-Civil War American history has notable strengths as well as curious gaps. The material on the colonial period, for example, discusses Native Americans, European exploration, regional differences in the British colonies, and the lives of “large landowners, farmers, artisans, women, indentured servants, slaves, and Native

### ✓ DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

**Georgia Performance Standards for Social Studies, K–8, U.S. history segments (2004, revised 2008)**

**Accessed from:**

[https://www.georgiastandards.org/standards/Pages/BrowseStandards/GPS\\_by\\_Grade\\_Level\\_K-8.aspx](https://www.georgiastandards.org/standards/Pages/BrowseStandards/GPS_by_Grade_Level_K-8.aspx)

**Georgia Performance Standards for Social Studies, High School, U.S. history segments (2004)**

**Accessed from:**

<https://www.georgiastandards.org/standards/Pages/BrowseStandards/SocialStudiesStandards9-12.aspx>

Americans.” But it then segues directly into “the causes, events, and results of the American Revolution” without, for example, considering the origins of representative government or slavery in the colonies. Likewise, students learn about the weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation and the major issues of the Constitutional Convention, including the compromises over slavery and the slave trade. Yet the crucial events of the 1790s, the election of 1800, and the Jacksonian era are left out.

Fifth grade follows much the same pattern. The standards include the sectional conflicts over states’ rights and slavery, the Civil War and Reconstruction, and the replacement of slavery by sharecropping and Jim Crow laws. But the coverage of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is *extremely* spotty and incomplete: Populism and Progressivism, for example, are entirely omitted.

At times, the outlines for both fourth and fifth grades seem unrealistically dense, presenting more detail than children at those ages seem likely to absorb. At other points, however, the outlines are too patchy, leaving out key content and issues without which students will be unable to grasp the causes of later events.

Georgia students do not study American history again until high school, but the eighth-grade course on Georgia history is generally well-integrated with American history (although the importance of slavery in the state’s history is barely mentioned until the “issues and events that led to the Civil War”).

It is unclear, however, how long the high school course is meant to be, since it is simply assigned to grades nine through twelve. Is it to be one year, or two? Is this decision left to local districts? Two years would certainly allow teachers to study the content in greater depth. But the standards do not specify.

Here the content is organized chronologically rather than by strand—a welcome change, logically keeping related content together. And, while the standards do not fully make up for all the omissions in earlier grades, much of the content missing from fourth and fifth grades is addressed here. For example, the curriculum mentions the Virginia House of Burgesses, New England town meetings, and the importance of the colonial legislatures. The Atlantic slave trade is included (without, however, mentioning the key role of African slave traders) as well as the Great Awakening, social mobility in the colonies, French-British imperial tensions, the French and Indian War, and other noteworthy examples.

Unfortunately, omissions continue to be a problem. The conflicts at the Constitutional Convention are handled well, yet the crucial Washington and John Adams presidencies are given short shrift. Jefferson’s purchase of Louisiana and sponsorship of the Lewis and Clark expedition are discussed, but the election of 1800 is again excluded. On the other hand,

the crises over slavery—the rise of sectionalism, the Missouri Compromise, the nullification crisis, the Mexican War, the Wilmot Proviso, and Compromise of 1850—are catalogued with a level of detail unusual in a high school standard.

In the twentieth century, the domestic crackdowns and Red Scare of 1919–20 are correctly included in Wilson’s era rather than the 1920s. The New Deal is covered in considerable detail. But the section on World War II is actually less thorough than it is in fifth grade. For example, German and Japanese aggression is left out and Hitler is not mentioned (all were discussed in fifth grade), while the Japanese American internment is stressed.

The Cold War and post-war periods include much useful detail. McCarthyism is discussed in the context of foreign (though not domestic) Communist expansion; the civil rights movement, the Warren Court, the agitations of the 1960s, Nixon’s foreign-policy achievements, and Watergate are all considered. However, a tendency to break material into thematic blocks results in some unfortunate chronological jumbles. For example, the Vietnam War appears before the baby boom, Jackie Robinson, or the space race. The final period, from Carter to the present, comes across as a rushed afterthought.

## Content and Rigor Conclusion

On the whole, the Georgia standards contain much solid detail, but there are problems throughout. At times, the content for fourth and fifth grades is unrealistically dense for those age levels—yet some key issues (e.g., the rise of representative government and slavery), to which students at any level should be exposed, are either touched upon only tangentially or omitted entirely. The confusing, strand-based organization of the elementary standards leaves gaps in both content and context. The high school material is more coherently organized, and often offers admirable sophistication and detail—but there remain troubling omissions and thematic departures from chronology. Taken together, these standards earn the Peach State a five out of seven for Content and Rigor. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

## Clarity and Specificity Conclusion

Georgia’s grade-level sequence is both rational and straightforward. The standards generally make clear what students are expected to know. Yet the reliance upon social studies jargon (content areas defined, for example, as “understandings”) undermines clarity of presentation, and the division of material among overlapping strands unnecessarily breaks up related content. It is also unclear how much time will be devoted to the high school U.S. history course. These weaknesses pull Georgia’s Clarity and Specificity score down to a two out of three. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

# HAWAII • U.S. HISTORY



GRADE

**C**

SCORES

Content and Rigor **5/7**  
Clarity and Specificity **1/3**

TOTAL SCORE

**6/10**

## Overview

Despite occasional gaps and inadequate specificity, Hawaii’s standards cover much essential U.S. history content. Unfortunately, the rigor of the standards is seriously undermined by the state’s decision to divide all U.S. history content across fifth, eighth, and tenth grades. In doing so, no basic review of earlier content is even specified in later grades, relegating America’s crucial early history to ages when children’s sophistication is not yet fully developed.

## Goals and Organization

Hawaii’s social studies standards provide grade-specific standards for all grades, K–11. (Additional course-specific standards are provided on the state’s website—though *not* in the actual standards document—for political science/government, geography, and nine other subject-specific courses, which are likely intended as twelfth-grade electives.)

The standards are divided across five strands, which are common to all grade levels: history, political science/civics, cultural anthropology, geography, and economics. Each strand is then subdivided into one or more thematic “standards,” which are again common across grades. The history strand is divided at all grades into three standards: two historical understanding standards (“change, continuity, and causality,” and “inquiry, empathy, and perspective”), followed by a grade-specific history content standard.

Each standard is then subdivided into “topics”; within the grade-specific “history” content standards, topics are largely chronological. One or more performance “benchmarks” are provided for each topic, each accompanied by a “sample performance assessment,” which is a suggested exercise by which students will demonstrate mastery of the benchmark. (In addition, the performance assessments often add specific details and examples that flesh out the benchmarks.) Finally, the state provides a “rubric” for each performance assessment, which details student performance from novice to advanced.

Hawaiian students are introduced to historical thinking from Kindergarten through third grade, where the standards emphasize concepts of chronology, differences between past and present, famous individuals, holidays, American political symbols, the concept of democracy, and the nature of primary sources. Hawaiian history is introduced in fourth grade.

American history is presented as a one-time-only sequence, divided across fifth, eighth, and tenth grades. Fifth grade runs from “three worlds meet” (i.e., early contact and settlement) through the American Revolution. Eighth grade runs from the Revolutionary War through Reconstruction. Tenth grade covers post-Reconstruction to the present.

### DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

**Hawaii Content and Performance Standards for Social Studies, U.S. history segments (2005)**

**Accessed from:**

<http://standardstoolkit.k12.hi.us/index.html>

## Evaluation

Hawaii’s history strand opens in each grade with a two-part section on “historical understanding.” The first part urges students to understand change and continuity over time as well as the chronological development of “causal relationships.” The second, and even more commendable, part encourages students to practice “inquiry, empathy, and perspective.” They are to learn that historical perspectives and interpretations change, and that the past must therefore be understood “on its own terms” and “in the context of its time,” without “imposing present norms and values on historical events.” Fifth graders, in a noteworthy example, are asked to consider “why slavery was accepted by a majority of the people in colonial America.”

In short, the state encourages students to comprehend *context*, and to reject judgments based on present-day perceptions—i.e. to think *historically*. It is a very promising start.

Regrettably, the standards’ content does not do full justice to these high-minded goals. Despite the appeal to historical thinking, the standards themselves are presented in a bewildering set of charts delineating strands, benchmarks, sample performance assessments, and rubrics, making it difficult for teachers or students to extract the content that is meant to be covered.

An even more serious flaw emerges in the state’s choice of sequence. Unfortunately, a single extended U.S. history course is split among fifth, eighth, and tenth grades, with all history prior to American independence relegated to fifth grade, when students’ sophistication and retention is limited. The early Republic to the Civil War appears only in eighth grade, not in high school. There is no separate coverage of all American history in high school, and no recapitulation or review is specified in later grades for material previously covered.

Despite the confusing organization, early grades begin well. An admirable emphasis is placed on chronology and the nature of historical evidence. Discussion of the very different lives of children in the past is a clever way to engage young students. Famous individuals are discussed starting in first grade—though the result is odd grab-bag of names, such as Pocahontas, George Washington, Booker T. Washington, Daniel Boone, and Benjamin Franklin. Political content, such as the roots of American democracy, is unfortunately consigned entirely to the civics strand and thus separated from historical content.

The fifth-grade course—the only time Hawaii students will study colonial history—reflects a fairly comprehensive effort to establish rigor and content. The historical understanding thread continues to stress chronology, historical thinking, and the avoidance of presentism—that is, judgments of the past

through the lens of today’s values, standards, and norms. Early European explorers are covered, as is their contact and interaction with Native American cultures. Settler life and religious and regional differences are dealt with, as are the beginnings of slavery and the slave trade. However, the level of detail varies. Some content descriptions are overly broad. For example, “the Stamp Act, Boston Massacre, the Boston Tea party, and other events” are all that are listed for the imperial crisis. Other expectations are more comprehensive; another item lists “natural rights, government by the consent of the governed, and ‘all men are created equal’” for the key ideas of the Declaration of Independence. The crucial rise of representative government in the colonies is discussed, but unfortunately split off in the separate civics strand.

Eighth grade picks up American history from the early republic and continues through Reconstruction. The historical outline touches on many key points often neglected in state standards, including weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation, key debates at the Constitutional Convention, the rise of the first party system, and the election of 1800. Jacksonian democracy is discussed, alongside Seneca Falls and the early women’s rights movement. Industrialization, internal improvements, westward expansion, and the events of the growing sectional crisis are also outlined (including the oft-neglected Mexican War, slavery in the territories, and Bleeding Kansas). Following the Civil War, rarely-included items appear, such as a comparison of “Lincoln’s conciliatory policy for readmitting the former Confederate states into the Union with that of the more punitive plan of congressional Republicans,” together with the Black Codes, the Ku Klux Klan, and Jim Crow laws.

Such items are comprehensive, clear, and specific. Yet the problems that arise from splitting American history among fifth, eighth, and tenth grades are exacerbated by the tenth grade standards. Not only does the state fail to take advantage of high school students’ greater sophistication with a full review of earlier U.S. history, the tenth-grade course is, if anything, *less* detailed and demanding than the material outlined in earlier grades. The content continues to cover many key issues and themes, including late nineteenth-century immigration and urbanization, the Gilded Age, *laissez-faire* and the trusts. It goes on through American imperialism, the Great Depression, and both world wars. But, for instance, the labor movement is missing from the discussion of Progressivism. The section on the coming of World War II discusses Japanese aggression (not surprising in Hawaiian schools) yet fails to mention Hitler or European fascism. Such gaps undermine an otherwise competent sequence, and make it doubly regrettable that the better outlines for earlier eras are to be used only at less sophisticated ages.

## Content and Rigor Conclusion

Hawaii deserves credit for its explicit appeal to historical context and comprehension, and its careful attempt to explain the dangers of presentism. But the decision to teach U.S. history as a single course split across three grades seriously undermines the state's commendable aims. And while the fifth- and eighth-grade standards are, on balance, quite rigorous, serious substantive gaps and the failure to increase sophistication in tenth grade lessen confidence that Hawaiian students will learn the essential content necessary to become historically literate citizens. Taken together, these strengths and shortcomings earn Hawaii five out of seven for Content and Rigor. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

## Clarity and Specificity Conclusion

The sequence—despite its flaws—is plainly defined and course scope is often solid and comprehensible. Unfortunately, detail is sometimes lacking, and the division of content into strands breaks up related material, introducing unnecessary confusion and encouraging an ahistorical, thematic approach in the classroom. Worse, the complex charts of strands, benchmarks, sample performance assessments, and rubrics undermine the clarity of presentation, obscure solid content, and render the document unwieldy for classroom use. These flaws pull Hawaii down to a one out of three in Clarity and Specificity. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)



GRADE

**F**

SCORES

Content and Rigor 1/7  
Clarity and Specificity 0/3

TOTAL SCORE

**1/10**

## Overview

Idaho’s U.S. history content is vague to the point of nonexistence. General thematic “goals” give way to almost equally nonspecific “objectives,” leaving even a basic course scope barely defined. Students are directed to understand American history, but hardly any content is outlined with which they might begin to do so.

## Goals and Organization

Idaho’s social studies standards are divided by individual grades from K–5, then into topical courses such as U.S. History I (grades 6–12) and U.S. History II (grades 9–12). There is also a course titled American Government listed for grades 9–12.

Within each grade level or course, the standards are divided into five strands (which are actually called “standards”): history, geography, economics, civics and government, and global perspectives. Each strand is then divided into a set of “goals.” Both the strands and goals are common across all grades and courses. Finally, the goals are provided with between one and seven grade- or course-specific learning “objectives” (though objectives are not provided for every goal in every grade or course).

Five of the history strand’s nine goals relate to American history:

- Build an understanding of the cultural and social development of the United States;
- Trace the role of migration and immigration of people in the development of the United States;
- Identify the role of American Indians in the development of the United States;
- Analyze the political, social, and economic responses to industrialization and technological innovations in the development of the United States; and
- Trace the role of exploration and expansion in the development of the United States.

In addition, some of the five civics goals are relevant to U.S. history, such as: “Build an understanding of the foundational principles of the American political system,” or “Build an understanding of the organization and formation of the American system of government.”

American history first appears in fifth grade; no chronological scope is specified, but the broadly thematic objectives refer to events from pre-settlement through to the Constitution. The U.S. History I course, assigned anywhere between grades six and twelve, appears—as far as one can tell—to return to the colonial period, before running up to the

### ✓ DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

**Idaho Social Studies Content Standards, U.S. history segments (August 2009)**

**Accessed from:**

[http://www.sde.idaho.gov/site/content\\_standards/ss\\_standards.htm](http://www.sde.idaho.gov/site/content_standards/ss_standards.htm)

Civil War. The U.S. History II course, meant to fall somewhere in grades nine through twelve, seems intended to run from the Civil War to the present.

## Evaluation

Idaho’s social studies content standards are poorly named, for they contain hardly any content. Abstract and thematic goals lay out a uniform set of decontextualized, non-chronological issues or concepts. And the objectives, which are meant to outline grade- and course-specific content, are nearly as vague. Take, for example, the U.S. History I course’s jaw-dropping directive to “discuss the causes and effects of various compromises and conflicts in American history such as the American Revolution, Civil War and Reconstruction.”

The substance, such as it is, of American history begins in fifth grade, with a sampling of non-chronological objectives split among various goals. These mention: Native Americans, other cultural groups (not specified) and individuals (not specified) that shaped American history, the motives of European settlers, the lives of indentured servants, the slave trade, the motives for and experience of Western expansion, and the concept of Indian reservations. In the civics strand, students are to explain the important concepts in the Declaration of Independence, discuss the significance of the Articles of Confederation, and understand the basic concepts of the United States Constitution and Bill of Rights. Yet there is no historical context or explanation with which to understand or explain *any* of these examples.

The U.S. History I course, still using the same fixed set of five goals, tosses out just *eighteen* broad, nonspecific objectives for the entire history strand. Students are, for instance, to “compare and contrast the different cultural and social influences that emerged in the North American colonies”—though there is no mention of *what* those influences might be. Additionally, they are expected to “describe the experiences of culturally, ethnically, and racially different groups existing as part of American society prior to the Civil War,” and to “analyze the common traits, beliefs, and characteristics that unite the United States as a nation and a society.”

Chronological outlining is completely absent. Students are simply told to “summarize the major events in the European settlement of North America from Jamestown to the end of the 18th century,” or to “identify the United States territorial expansion between 1801 and 1861 and explain internal and external conflicts.” A few moderately specific facts are mentioned, but not explained or contextualized: The slave trade, Manifest Destiny, Native American policy, and Native American resistance to assimilation are among the examples. The consequences of science and technology are mentioned

without specifics; the role of various countries in settling the American colonies is referenced—but none of those countries are named.

As in fifth grade, political history is shoehorned into the civics strand, touching on “the development of constitutional democracy in the United States,” with references to “the Mayflower Compact, colonial assemblies, [and] Bacon’s Rebellion.” The “fundamental values and principles” of the founding documents are mentioned but are not presented or explained. A few events linked to foreign affairs—the War of 1812, the Monroe Doctrine, the Mexican and Spanish American Wars—appear in the “global perspectives” strand. Again, there is no historical frame to guide teachers in contextualizing any of this material.

The U.S. History II course continues this pattern and, incredibly, the history strand’s fifteen objectives are even less specific than U.S History I. Much of modern U.S. history is not even touched upon, and what is mentioned receives no meaningful context or explanation. Students are to “analyze” how arts, beliefs, and values “have enriched American society.” They are also to “discuss the causes and effects of various compromises and conflicts in American history.” Immigration, a key issue of the period, is at least mentioned—though students are merely told to discuss the “motives” behind it, and the “changes in the political, social, and economic conditions of immigrant groups.” They are likewise asked to explain industrialization and its socio-political consequences, “the causes of the Great Depression and its effects upon American society,” and the shift from an industrial to a technological society in the twentieth century. But that is all: Students are *told* to understand these broad concepts, but are given no historical or intellectual content with which to do so. *Plessy v. Ferguson* and *Brown v. Board of Education* pop up, without explication, in the civics strand. Passing references to the world wars, the United Nations, the Marshall Plan, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War appear in the “global perspectives” strand, merely listed as “principal events in the United States’ relations with the world.”

The high school American government course adds “historical milestones that led to the creation of limited government in the United States” as exemplified by the founding documents. A reference to state constitutions and charters is the closest the course ever comes to mentioning relevant substantive information, aside from brief, unexplained references to the Magna Carta and other background documents in the civics course’s own civics strand.

The only additional guidance for history teachers is a series of vocabulary lists provided for each grade level and course—but these words seem random, and though they are listed, they

are not defined. Moreover, it is specifically noted that these lists are “not to be taught to students”; they merely reflect “concepts that students may encounter in classroom or state assessments,” and are “intended to match the language of instruction to the language of assessment.”

## Content and Rigor Conclusion

Idaho’s inaptly named “content standards” do not *completely* fail to mention specific historical fact, but they come perilously close. Occasional events and concepts from American history are invoked but never explained in context. Rigor is nonexistent: Students are simply directed to understand broad themes of history, without any course structure or content outline. They are thus expected to *apply* knowledge that is never provided them. As social studies doctrine dictates, schools are to teach children *how* to learn; the learning of actual content is not the concern of these standards. Bare references to a few points of substance earn Idaho a marginal one out of seven for Content and Rigor. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

## Clarity and Specificity Conclusion

Idaho’s curriculum guidelines are poorly structured from the outset: Kindergarten through fifth-grade guidelines are individually outlined (so far as they go), yet U.S. History I is to be taught anywhere from grade six to grade twelve and U.S. History II anywhere from grade nine to grade twelve. It is impossible to establish coherent standards for a course that could be offered to students at vastly different levels of development and intellectual sophistication. Scope is difficult to determine, since so little content is provided in each course outline. Idaho’s formalistic layout, with identical standards and goals inflexibly applied to every grade and course, reduce history to a set of rigid, ahistorical categories. *Telling* students to know history without providing content or specifying expectations is not adequate. Idaho’s unclear and non-specific standards earn a zero out of three for Clarity and Specificity. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

# ILLINOIS • U.S. HISTORY



GRADE

**D**

SCORES

Content and Rigor **3/7**  
Clarity and Specificity **1/3**

TOTAL SCORE

**4/10**

## Overview

Illinois’s official U.S. history standards are exceptionally vague. Only general content expectations are delineated for ill-defined age blocks, making a coherent American history curriculum difficult to discern. The state does provide a separate assessment framework with a better (though still flawed) content overview. Unfortunately, Illinois explicitly declares that this framework “should not be considered state curricula,” which suggests that the few enhancements it provides do little to ensure that Illinois students will learn the content necessary to become historically literate citizens.

## Goals and Organization

The Illinois social science learning standards are divided into five strands, or “goals”: political systems, economics, history, geography, and social systems. These are divided, in turn, among “skills” headings; and finally into learning directives (or standards). These learning directives are not, however, presented by grade. Instead, they are arranged by non-specific age levels: early elementary, late elementary, middle/junior high school, early high school and late high school.

Following a brief list of U.S. and world historical eras, the history strand is divided into five skills headings:

- Apply the skills of historical analysis and interpretation;
- Understand the development of significant political events;
- Understand the development of economic systems;
- Understand Illinois, United States, and world social history; and
- Understand Illinois, United States, and world environmental history.

The separate *Illinois Social Science Assessment Framework* offers additional content guidelines for social science courses in grades five, eight, and eleven, dividing material thematically among the social science goals (i.e., history, geography, political systems, etc., although the framework identifies these only by number—civics is “goal 14,” history is “goal 16,” and so forth).

As part of its history goal, the framework offers specific, chronologically organized outlines of U.S. history for grades five, eight, and eleven. Each grade, as laid out in the framework, constitutes a full, independent course on American history from settlement to the 1960s, with greater detail provided at each level; eleventh grade briefly carries the story to the present.

### ✓ DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

**Illinois Learning Standards, Social Science, U.S. history section (1997)**

**Accessed from:**

[http://www.isbe.state.il.us/ils/social\\_science/standards.htm](http://www.isbe.state.il.us/ils/social_science/standards.htm)

**Illinois Social Science Assessment Framework, Grades 5, 8 and 11, U.S. history section (2007)**

**Accessed from:**

[http://www.isbe.state.il.us/assessment/pdfs/IAF\\_Soc\\_Sci\\_9\\_2007.pdf](http://www.isbe.state.il.us/assessment/pdfs/IAF_Soc_Sci_9_2007.pdf)

It's crucial, however, to note the admonition that the framework is “not designed to replace local curricula and should not be considered state curricula.” The Illinois Department of Education website explains that the framework is provided at the request of teachers. Its use is clearly optional.

## Evaluation

Illinois's history standards open with Santayana's oft-repeated quote about repeating history. “Students who can examine and analyze the events of the past,” they continue, “have a powerful tool for understanding the events of today and the future. They develop an understanding of how people, nations, actions and interactions have led to today's realities. In the process, they can better define their own roles as participating citizens.”

Lofty and praiseworthy aims, to be sure, but unfortunately, the standards provide essentially no substance to back them up. Instead, the standards concentrate on conventional social studies skills and categories. No specific content is outlined for any grade level—just decontextualized, non-chronological standards. Students are told to understand concepts of chronology and causality, but the history standard provides “themes” instead of chronological or causal structure. Fragments of historical content are arbitrarily scattered across the thematic skills headings.

In the late elementary grades, for instance, students are asked to “describe how the European colonies in North America developed politically” and to “identify major causes of the American Revolution and describe the consequences of the Revolution through the early national period, including the roles of George Washington, Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin,” and so on. Similarly vague issues of political history persist into the twentieth century. These items are reasonable starting points, but they provide no specifics with which to develop a coherent historical narrative—or with which teachers might structure their classes.

Later grades fall into the same trap. Middle school students are expected to “explain how and why the colonies fought for their independence.” Early high school students are to “identify political ideas that have dominated United States historical eras (e.g., Federalist, Jacksonian, Progressivist [*sic*], New Deal, [and] New Conservative [*sic*]).” Late high school students are asked to “analyze how United States political history has been influenced by the nation's economic, social, and environmental history.”

Slavery, westward expansion, and industrialization are lumped under the history strand's economic systems heading, scattered among age blocks. The social history heading includes such sweeping topics as the motives for colonial

settlement and the influence of key individuals and groups, including “Susan B. Anthony/suffrage and Martin Luther King, Jr./civil rights.”

Some items appear in separate sections of the standards altogether. For instance, the political systems strand (again, *not* to be confused with the “understand the development of significant political events” heading within the history strand) mentions “the historical events and processes that brought about changes in United States political ideas and traditions.” The examples given—“(e.g., the New Deal, Civil War)” — reveal careless disregard for basic chronology. Such arbitrary divisions into themes and strands—artificial constructs which subvert context and chronology—make it nearly impossible to understand causal connections or relationships. Historical figures are hardly ever mentioned.

Thankfully, the separate *Assessment Framework* supplies some of the detail omitted in the learning standards. Unlike the mostly conceptual standards, it includes many specific people, events, and concepts, with content becoming more detailed and rigorous at each grade level.

But the *Assessment Framework* itself divides much related material into separate strands, frequently defying chronological logic. An item on the Supreme Court in the U.S. government strand, for instance, jumps from *Marbury v. Madison* to *U.S. v. Nixon*; similarly, an item on civil rights runs from the *Dred Scott* decision to the Fair Housing Act of 1968.

Chronological inconsistencies in the optional *Framework* continue. Some historical content is pressed into thematic content items out of chronological sequence, and there are odd gaps and oversights in the history outline itself. Slavery and the slave trade are the first items in each grade's outline, appearing *before* discussion of European exploration and settlement. Hardly anything is said about the development of the colonies before the American Revolution. And the outlines skip almost everything between the Constitutional Convention and the Jacksonian era.

## Content and Rigor Conclusion

The Illinois U.S. history curriculum seems to suffer from a content-and-rigor split personality. The official learning standards focus on theoretical social studies skills and categories, providing little historical detail and splitting what does appear into counterintuitive themes and strands. The assessment framework—despite its own flaws of omission and thematic arrangement—*does* include significantly more specific U.S. history content than the official standards, but this document it is explicitly *not* official or required. Its existence partially boosts the state's content offerings, but its

optional nature can raise the score to no more than a three out of seven in Content and Rigor. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

### **Clarity and Specificity Conclusion**

Illinois's learning standards provide minimal guidance on scope or sequence. Amorphous age groups are presented instead of individual grades; students are directed to explain broad historical issues while specific facts and chronology are not outlined. Detail is nearly absent and there is only the vaguest sense of measurable objectives. The assessment framework does provide specific course descriptions for grades five, eight, and eleven, each of which is meant to cover American history in its entirety; its organization, though complex, is comprehensible and is presented in clear prose. Yet the utility and impact of this optional framework are uncertain. Illinois's standards, overall, can earn no better than a one out of three for Clarity and Specificity. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

# INDIANA • U.S. HISTORY



GRADE

**A-**

SCORES

Content and Rigor **6/7**  
Clarity and Specificity **3/3**

TOTAL SCORE

**9/10**

## Overview

On balance, Indiana’s U.S. history standards present solid and substantive content, albeit with scattered errors and thematic departures from chronology. Unfortunately, the decision to cover U.S. history as a single once-through sequence (split across grades five, eight, and high school) shortchanges early American history, which is covered only in earlier grades when student comprehension is inevitably limited.

## Goals and Organization

Indiana’s K–8 social studies standards are divided into four thematic strands: history, civics and government, geography, and economics. For each strand, the state provides a straightforward outline, with thematic or chronological headings and grade-specific content expectations.

The organization of the high school standards differs in two important ways. First, the standards are presented by course—such as U.S. History, U.S. Government, and World History—rather than by grade level. Second, within each course, the standards are not divided by thematic strand; strands relevant to each content item are instead noted parenthetically.

Indiana’s engagement with history in general, and America in particular, begins in Kindergarten and first grade with the study of national symbols and holidays, concepts of chronology, and differences between the past and the present. The basics of U.S. government are covered in second grade. Native Americans and basic local history are introduced in third grade, along with distinctions between historical fact and fiction. Fourth grade offers a more sophisticated course on Indiana history.

American history per se is treated in a single sequence over grades five, eight, and high school, with limited recapitulation of earlier periods in later courses. Fifth grade covers the pre-Columbian era to 1800; eighth grade runs from the post-Revolutionary period to Reconstruction; the high school course covers Reconstruction to the present.

## Evaluation

Despite the unfortunate division of K–8 grade outlines into thematic strands, Indiana puts a clear emphasis on historical knowledge. The history strand consistently receives the most space, with the others treated as subject-specific adjuncts. Even in early grades, important issues and concepts are raised, including basic coverage of American constitutional government. Exploring the distinction between historical reality and historical fiction is a welcome touch.

### DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

**Indiana Academic Standards: Social Studies, U.S. history segments (2008)**

**Accessed from:**

<http://dc.doe.in.gov/Standards/AcademicStandards/PrintLibrary/socialstudies.shtml>

The main U.S. history sequence begins in fifth grade, running through 1800. The course is on the whole quite good, and the content is age-appropriate and well developed. The overview of pre-Columbian cultures in North America, early European exploration, first European settlements, basic motives for colonization, cooperation/conflict with the Native Americans, and colonial settlement is solid and thorough for the grade level, despite some gaps (the origins and legal establishment of slavery in the colonies is, for instance, barely mentioned). In the Revolutionary era, the outline touches on grievances revealed in the Declaration of Independence, leading figures of the Revolutionary War, the French and other foreign allies, the role of women and minorities, and the achievement of independence. There is solid material on the Constitutional Convention, the Bill of Rights, and the party schism of the 1790s. A final heading in the history strand introduces the study of primary and secondary sources. The civics section expands upon the key founding political documents and includes discussion of town meetings and colonial legislatures.

There are occasional errors in the fifth-grade outline: John Adams's election is incorrectly dated to 1798; John Singer Sargent is listed as a colonial artist, when John Singleton Copley is surely meant. But the major problem with the grade's outline is that, except for brief review in eighth grade, students will not study the colonial period after fifth grade—when students' intellectual sophistication and retention of detail are inevitably limited. The eighth-grade U.S. history does begin with a “review of key ideas related to the colonization of America and the revolution and Founding Era,” but the guidelines only look back at Native American cultures and the broad issues of the imperial rivalry over North America through the American Revolution.

The depth and scope of historical content do, however, improve substantially with the eighth grade's study of the state constitutions, the Constitutional Convention, the ratifying conventions, the Federalist/anti-Federalist debates, the implementation of the Constitution by the first and second federal Congresses (a critical subject rarely mentioned in school curricula), the early-party schism, and the election of 1800. Moving into the nineteenth century, the standards discuss the growing differences between the North and South over slavery, the Louisiana Purchase, key early Supreme Court decisions, the War of 1812, and the Monroe Doctrine. Manifest Destiny and westward expansion are noted, together with Northern abolition and the conflict over slavery in the territories. Thematic groupings do lead to some chronological jumbling: The Compromise of 1850, grouped with conflicts over slavery, appears before Jacksonian Democracy. There are also some gaps: The nullification crisis and nativism are, for instance, missing. The political crises of the 1850s are generally

well-covered; yet, while *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Dred Scott, and the Lincoln-Douglas debates all appear, John Brown's raid is oddly missing—only his name appears, without explanation, in a list of people connected to reform movements. The Civil War and Reconstruction are also scant on detail.

Indiana's high school U.S. history course begins with a review—again, too brief and general—of the period from 1775 through Reconstruction and the post-slavery South; important details of Reconstruction, absent in eighth grade, are supplied, though Andrew Johnson's impeachment, the Black Codes, and the Compromise of 1877 are still missing. As the course moves into the late nineteenth century, content is often impressively clear and detailed, achieving a still higher level of rigor and detail than in earlier grades. The standards cover industrialization, machine politics, Populism and reform movements, new technologies, immigration, the growth of unions and the labor movement, government attempts to regulate business and industry, land and Native American policy in the West, segregation and *Plessy v. Ferguson*, state and national Progressivism, cultural changes, and expansionism and imperialism. The section on the 1920s, unfortunately, includes the Red Scare, the Palmer Raids, and the rise of Prohibition, implicitly linking them to the administrations of Harding, Coolidge, and Hoover—though all these events occurred in the previous decade during Wilson's presidency.

The New Deal, the isolationist movement, and the approach of World War II are well-covered (though the war itself is handled rather briefly); the specifics of the early Cold War and the civil rights movement of the 1940s through the 1960s are skillfully summarized. Many state standards rush through the last few decades of U.S. history, but Indiana encompasses Lyndon Johnson's Great Society and social programs, U.S.-Soviet relations (to the 1980s), the Vietnam War, Watergate, the Iran hostage crisis, the Iran-Contra scandal, the Clinton impeachment, the disputed 2000 election, the 9/11 terrorist attacks, and both Gulf Wars. Even such details as the air traffic controllers' strike and the Gramm-Rudman-Hollings Act are included.

## Content and Rigor Conclusion

Indiana's American history standards are, in general, notably clear and specific; sometimes they are exceptional. Despite the separation of K–8 courses into the usual social studies thematic strands, historical material is generally kept together; thematic departures from chronology occur, but do not seriously undermine coherence or comprehension. The standards for grades five and eight are well-structured for those age groups, and the high school course is substantially more sophisticated and detailed.

Unfortunately, Indiana repeats the serious mistake (made also in some other states with otherwise strong standards) of breaking up a single U.S. history sequence among grades five, eight, and high school, relegating early American history to earlier grades when student sophistication is limited. The standards' strong grade-appropriateness actually highlights the fact that earlier material is covered in less depth; and since later grades look back to earlier periods with only spotty recapitulation, it is unlikely that students will retain much of this early material by the time they graduate. Despite this serious flaw in sequence—and despite some gaps and occasional inaccuracies in content, especially in earlier grades—Indiana's general substance, depth, and care earn the state a six out of seven for Content and Rigor. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

### **Clarity and Specificity Conclusion**

Indiana presents a single standards document that is consistently clear and straightforward. Each grade's content is outlined coherently and with little jargon. The division of K–8 grades into the usual social studies strands is, as noted above, minimally disruptive, and the high school course abandons the strands altogether. Teachers and students are told plainly what they are expected to teach and to learn. Grade-by-grade progression is clearly laid out—even if, as noted above, it is not always well-conceived. Detail is not always consistent, but increases with grade level and is frequently solid, offering a clear outline of essential content. The standards earn a three out of three for Clarity and Specificity. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)



GRADE

**F**

SCORES

Content and Rigor 0/7  
Clarity and Specificity 0/3

TOTAL SCORE

**0/10**

## Overview

Iowa had no published U.S. history standards before 2009, and for all practical purposes, it still has none. Its “content areas” contain no content, and its hopelessly broad and theoretical expectations lay out no specifics whatsoever—not even defining the basic historical material to be taught in different grades. Iowa’s history standards are, in short, almost devoid of history.

## Goals and Organization

Iowa’s social studies standards are divided among “five core social studies content areas,” or strands: behavioral sciences, economics, geography, history, and political science/civic literacy.

Each core content area is further divided into broad grade ranges: Primary (K–2); Intermediate (3–5); Middle (6–8); and High School (9–12). Within each, conceptual or thematic content headings are presented, called “Essential Knowledge and/or Skill” (these headings are frequently identical for a given strand across the different grade blocks). Under each such heading, various conceptual examples are supplied. Suggested classroom exercises, described as “illustrations,” appear under selected “essential knowledge” headings.

For example, one high school heading directs students to: “Understand the role of culture and cultural diffusion on the development and maintenance of societies.” So-called “examples” under this heading include: “Understand the ways groups, societies, and cultures have addressed human needs and concerns in the past” and “Understand societal patterns for preserving and transmitting culture while adapting to environmental or social change.” Finally, an illustration provided for this heading suggests various ways in which students might examine 1920s consumerism.

Since no specific content is assigned to any particular grade block, no course scope can be discerned at any grade level.

## Evaluation

“The history component of social studies,” Iowa’s core curriculum document declares, aims to “build upon a foundation of historical knowledge,” in order to “describe the relationship between historical facts, concepts, and generalizations. History draws upon cause and effect relationships within multiple social narratives to help explain complex human interactions. Understanding the past provides context for the present and implications for the future.”

### DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

**Iowa Core Curriculum: K–12 Social Studies, U.S. history segments (2000)**

**Accessed from:**

<http://www.corecurriculum.iowa.gov/ContentArea.aspx?C=Social+Studies>

If, however, Diogenes searched with his lamp through the Iowa standards for an honest attempt to create this substantive “foundation” he would discover a startling fact: *There is no history whatsoever in the Iowa “core curriculum.”*

Instead, the state offers little more than a series of vapid social studies concepts and skills. Students are expected to understand these concepts without having to bother with historical information.

At the high school level, for example, students are expected to analyze macro-historical questions such as change over time, cultural diffusion, promotion of change or stasis, the effects of economic needs or wants, and the effects of geography and innovation. Yet the examples provided under these headings are entirely divorced from *any knowledge or subject-specific historical content.*

Teachers and students are directed to respond to such vague directives as the following: “Analyze the actions of individuals and groups in the development of historical events,” “Identify significant individuals who have affected historical development in positive or negative ways,” “Analyze the ways various societies have met their economic needs and wants over time,” and “Identify and analyze the role geography has played during historical events.” Students are to “understand cause and effect relationships and other historical thinking skills in order to interpret events and issues,” but they are evidently to do so with whatever substance a particular teacher may happen to introduce.

The closest we come to specifics in the standards is a reference to a few of the founding documents in the civics section. Otherwise, the only references to actual history are random and isolated examples mentioned in suggested classroom exercises. For example, students might examine historic railroad maps, make a worksheet on “major events of the Civil War,” or list their most important rights and responsibilities.

In short, students are to analyze and understand history without being required to actually learn anything about it.

## Content and Rigor Conclusion

The so-called “core curriculum” contains neither core nor curriculum. No subject matter is clearly assigned to any grade, resulting in no measurable grade-specific levels of substance and/or rigor. The standards do not even make a meaningful distinction among American, world, and other histories. As a result, there is no Iowa U.S. history curriculum to assess—or indeed any historical curriculum at all—and the state’s standards cannot be awarded more than a zero out of seven for Content and Rigor. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

## Clarity and Specificity Conclusion

Iowa’s purported standards are an affront to the state’s teachers, parents, and students. The state offers no clear historical guidance and lays out no specific curriculum for any grade, never even beginning to define a workable scope or sequence. With no specifics to examine, clarity is not a meaningful category: The state earns a zero out of three for Clarity and Specificity. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

# KANSAS • U.S. HISTORY



GRADE

C

SCORES

Content and Rigor 4/7  
Clarity and Specificity 1/3

TOTAL SCORE

5/10

## Overview

Kansas's U.S. history standards offer much solid content and some exceptional items. Unfortunately, thematic organization too often trumps chronology, leading to confused clusters of material that obscure causality and historical logic. The state's decision to split U.S. history into a single course over grades five, eight, and high school—relegating earlier periods to earlier grades with minimal later recapitulation—further undermines what could have been far better standards.

## Goals and Organization

Kansas provides grade-specific social studies standards for grades K–8. These are first divided into four thematic strands: civics-government; economics; geography; and Kansas, United States, and world history. Each strand is further divided into thematic or chronological content “benchmarks,” and finally into “knowledge and/or application indicators.” (These indicators are what is commonly thought of as content standards.) In addition, the state offers related “instructional suggestions” for teachers, and “teacher notes” containing definitions of selected terms.

The high school standards are structured identically, but only a single set is provided for grades 9–12.

The study of U.S. history begins in first through third grades with an introduction to basic themes, such as the Declaration of Independence, the Plains Indians, immigration, and historical landmarks and monuments. Fourth grade is devoted to Kansas history (continued, in greater detail, in seventh grade).

The U.S. history sequence begins in fifth grade, running from pre-settlement to 1800. It continues in eighth grade, which runs from 1787 to Reconstruction, and concludes in high school, where the course extends from Reconstruction to the present.

## Evaluation

Kansas's social studies standards were prepared by a committee “of teachers, curriculum coordinators, professors and learning consultants ... in order to define what Kansas students should be able to do in history, civics-government, geography and economics.”

Problems are clear from the outset. Of the four content strands used in each grade, history is last. Worse, historical substance is presented in jargon-filled grids and charts, with content often broken up among strands, and sometimes among overly theoretical and thematic benchmarks within strands.

### ✓ DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

**Kansas Curricular Standards for History and Government; Economics and Geography, U.S. history segments (2005)**

**Accessed from:**

<http://www.ksde.org/Default.aspx?tabid=1715>

Furthermore, like several other states, Kansas has made the unfortunate decision to break the U.S. history curriculum into a single three-part sequence spanning grades five, eight, and high school—relegating much of American history to early grades in which students have limited sophistication and retention.

History coverage in Kindergarten through third grade is basic and conventional. Fourth grade’s introduction of Kansas history offers reasonable detail, but unfortunately little chronological organization.

American history begins in fifth grade with Native American cultures, running through the motives, technology, and consequences of European exploration. The motives listed are “trade, expansion, wealth, [and] discovery”—yet, strangely, the vital factor of religion is omitted. The crucial rise of town meetings and representative assemblies is discussed, as is the counterbalancing rise of slavery, which is usefully contextualized with indentured servitude. A noteworthy post-Revolution item, rarely found in school standards, is a discussion of the importance of George Washington in defining the Presidency, including leadership qualities, balance of power, the setting of precedents, cabinet selection, and term limits.

Despite the inclusion of much valuable content, however, chronology is at times jumbled. Discussion of the Revolutionary movement, for example, lists the “Proclamation of 1763, Intolerable Acts, Stamp Act, [and] taxation without representation.” Why is the 1765 Stamp Act listed *after* the 1774 Intolerable Acts—a sequence that obscures historical development and causality? And the Constitution, Bill of Rights, and other founding documents and important founders are shunted into the separate civics strand—again with little sense of their interrelation or chronological sequence.

Kansas history returns in seventh grade, with much solid detail (including, for instance, the significance of Bleeding Kansas and the Kansas-Nebraska Act, Kansas’s role in the Civil War, pressure on the Native American population, railroads and western expansion, Populism and Progressivism, and the Dust Bowl). But, one might ask, why is Kansas history revisited in depth after its introduction in fourth grade, while early American history is *not* revisited after its introduction in fifth grade?

The eighth grade U.S. history course begins with the Constitutional Convention—and oddly does *not* repeat the excellent fifth grade item on the importance of Washington’s presidency. It does cover the Jefferson/Hamilton schism and other key events of the 1790s, yet incorrectly groups the John Adams administration’s Alien and Sedition Acts with events during the Washington administration, leaving out the Adams

presidency and the election of 1800 altogether. The early nineteenth century (including the War of 1812, constitutional change, and western expansion) is both chronologically jumbled and lacking in adequate detail. Coverage of the Jacksonian era and its aftermath is better: To the credit of the standards, they include the rise of nativism, an oft-neglected topic.

The section on the coming of the Civil War is solid (including the central role of Kansas in the violent clashes over popular sovereignty and the territorial extension of slavery in the 1850s). But chronological problems persist: In one case, an item on constitutional interpretation during the Civil War era lists *Dred Scott vs. Sandford*, *Plessy vs. Ferguson*, and Lincoln’s suspension of habeas corpus. The Supreme Court, of course, handed down *Plessy vs. Ferguson* in 1896. Reconstruction is handled in more impressive detail; an unusual and praiseworthy item discusses the cultural romanticizing of the West and its impact on westward expansion.

High school U.S. history picks up in the late nineteenth century with the Gilded Age, big business, and the labor movement. William Jennings Bryan and the Populists are often left out of state curricula, but not in Kansas. The curriculum also covers Progressivism, American expansionism, U.S. entry into World War I, the home-front effects of the war (the First Red Scare and the Wilson administration’s related domestic crackdowns are included here and not, as in many other states, shunted into the 1920s), the women’s suffrage movement, business and consumer culture in the 1920s, social conflict (over immigration and prohibition, for example), race relations, and Jazz Age culture. It is all a bit rushed, but features a solid listing of supporting details.

The New Deal, interestingly, is not so much summarized as challenged: Students are to consider “the costs and benefits of New Deal programs” (e.g., budget deficits versus creating employment, the costs of expanding government, and dependence on subsidies). The instructional suggestions ask students to discuss whether these social programs have met the “needs of society as intended.” These questions are historically and intellectually valid, but the language is somewhat tendentious and seems to suggest an effort to nudge students toward a particular ideological conclusion—an inappropriate tactic in school standards, whether from left or right.

The period from World War II to the present includes most key historical events but, again, is often careless with chronology. For example, McCarthyism is thrown together with disparate social phenomena of the 1950s and 1960s, including federal aid to education, the interstate highway system, the space race, the New Frontier, and Lyndon Johnson’s Great Society. An item

on the “struggle for racial and gender equality” lumps together “*Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka*, the Little Rock Nine, Martin Luther King, Jr., Montgomery Bus Boycott, Voting Rights Act of 1965, Betty Friedan, NOW, ERA, [and] Title IX”—a non-chronological amalgam of issues and events spanning four decades.

### Content and Rigor Conclusion

The Kansas standards contain much solid content, but there are repeated and often puzzling gaps. Some material is covered in admirable and even unusual depth, while other important content is rushed or omitted entirely. There are repeated chronological muddles, exacerbated by the division of material among thematic benchmarks and trans-historical strands. Students will inevitably have difficulty developing a coherent understanding of how events and ideas unfolded over time. These problems, coupled with the crucial error of relegating earlier historical material to fifth and eighth grades without adequate recapitulation, seriously undermine these often competent and occasionally superior standards, lowering their score to a four out of seven for Content and Rigor. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

### Clarity and Specificity Conclusion

The scope and grade-level sequence of the curriculum are fairly straightforward, presenting a full course outline for each grade level (even if the division of historical eras among grades is, as noted, deeply flawed). But the *presentation* of this scope and sequence is obscured by formulaic and jargon-laden charts. The actual content, when extracted from this social studies matrix, defines what students are expected to know and to achieve with a fair amount of clarity; however, the substantive gaps, inconsistent detail, thematic groupings, and splicing of historical material into strands will likely keep students from achieving a coherent understanding of the assigned material. Overall, Kansas scores a one out of three for Clarity and Specificity. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

# KENTUCKY • U.S. HISTORY



GRADE

**D**

SCORES

Content and Rigor **2/7**  
Clarity and Specificity **1/3**

TOTAL SCORE

**3/10**

## Overview

Kentucky's heavily abstract and thematic standards not only fail to outline specific content in each grade, but also give little sense even of the historical time spans meant to be covered. Details of U.S. history make only fleeting appearances amid myriad strands, themes, and sub-themes.

## Goals and Organization

Kentucky delineates grade-specific social studies standards for grades 4–8 only. Additional standards are provided for primary grade bands (i.e., grades K–3), and for high school (grades 9–12).

The standards in each grade or grade band are first divided into five “big ideas,” or strands: government and civics, culture and societies, economics, geography, and historical perspective. Each big idea is then subdivided into “understandings” which constitute broad statements of target knowledge (for instance, students are to “understand that U.S. History can be analyzed by examining significant eras...to develop chronological understanding and recognize cause-and-effect relationships and multiple causation”). These understandings are supplemented by “skills and concepts,” which provide grade- or grade-band-specific learning objectives (such as “explain and draw inferences about the importance of major events in United States history”). Finally, the state lays out “related core content for assessment,” indicating which material from the skills and concepts will be targeted by state assessments.

Early grades (defined as an undifferentiated K–3 block) focus on rights, democracy, social differences, national symbols and holidays, and the Plains Indians. Fourth grade focuses on Kentucky history.

The U.S. history sequence begins in fifth grade, but the vagueness of the specific content makes the scope barely discernible. Fifth grade appears to cover the entirety of U.S. history, while eighth grade runs from pre-settlement to Reconstruction, and high school from Reconstruction to the present.

## Evaluation

Kentucky's standards, according to state education officials, “define what students should know and be able to do upon graduation from high school.”

In reality, searching for specific content in these documents is like searching for the proverbial needle in a haystack. “Historical perspective” is, notably, the last of Kentucky's five social studies big ideas. And *perspective* is not the same thing as *content*. How is

### ✓ DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

**Kentucky Combined Curriculum Document: Social Studies, U.S. history segments (2006)**

**Accessed from:**

<http://www.education.ky.gov/KDE/Instructional+Resources/Curriculum+Documents+andResources/Teaching+Tools/Combined+Curriculum+Documents/>

perspective to be achieved without specific knowledge? American history, where it can be found at all, is chopped up, pasted, and buried under the mountain of social studies charts, concepts, and assessments. Students are expected to understand, analyze, and interpret historical events, conditions, trends, and issues with the goal of developing historical perspective. Yet Kentucky’s U.S. history standards are virtually content-free.

Primary grades (K–3) focus on general concepts of American democracy, local Native American tribes, and national symbols and holidays. Students are also “to use a variety of primary and secondary sources (e.g., artifacts, diaries, [and] timelines) to interpret the past.” But no specific subject matter—beyond the grade block’s broad generalizations—is spelled out.

Fourth grade focuses on the state’s own government and background. A series of broad thematic queries mention interactions between European settlers and Native Americans, Kentucky symbols, and the reasons for settlement of Kentucky. Students are again “to describe significant events in the history of Kentucky and interpret different perspectives,” but almost no content is outlined.

In fifth grade, students are first introduced to U.S. history—but it is not immediately obvious what material is to be covered here or in other grades. A single understanding, which appears almost verbatim in the historical perspective strands for grades five, eight, and high school, does however tell students to consider certain “significant eras” in order “to develop chronological understanding and recognize cause-and-effect relationships and multiple causation.” For fifth grade, the eras listed run from colonization to the twentieth century. For eighth grade, they run from exploration and the “Great Convergence” of cultures to the Civil War. And for high school, they run from Reconstruction to the present. Each grade level’s scattered items of specific content fall within those same time spans.

The fifth-grade civics strand asks students to examine the basic functions of government and to understand the fundamental values embodied in the founding documents, e.g., “justice, equality, responsibility, [and] freedom.” Under the cultures and societies strand, students are to “identify early cultures (e.g., English, Spanish, French, [and] West African) in the United States and analyze their similarities and differences” and “describe various forms of interactions (compromise, cooperation, [and] conflict) that occurred between diverse groups (e.g., Native Americans, European Explorers, English colonists, [and] the British Parliament) in the history of the United States.”

But no chronology or factual foundation is provided for tackling these huge trans-historical themes. Indeed, under the historical perspective strand, the “Mayflower Compact, Emancipation

Proclamation, [and] Dr. Martin Luther King’s speech: *I Have a Dream*” are indiscriminately thrown together with no sense of their vastly different historical contexts.

Eighth-grade American history continues to ask students to analyze broad and generalized themes while furnishing them with no specific content. Under civics, students are to “describe and give examples to support how democratic government in the United States prior to Reconstruction functioned to preserve and protect the rights (e.g., voting), liberty and property of their citizens by making, enacting and enforcing appropriate rules and laws (e.g., constitutions, laws, [and] statutes)” and to describe how the Declaration of Independence, Constitution, and Bill of Rights “established democratic principles and guaranteed certain rights for all citizens.” Under the historical perspective strand, there are passing references to exploration, the “Great Convergence” of cultures after European contact, how ideals of equality and liberty informed the American Revolution, and how democracy expanded in the early United States. Students are to compare “political, social, economic and cultural differences (e.g., slavery, tariffs, industrialism vs. agrarianism, [and] federal vs. states’ rights)” before the Civil War, and evaluate the impact of the era’s science and technology. That, unfortunately, is about it.

The high school standards are provided in a single band, making it impossible to discern what students should know and be able to do in each high school grade. Indeed, in most of the strands, U.S. and world history are indiscriminately mixed together; many “skills and concepts” direct students to apply various themes to “the modern world (1500 A.D. to present) and United States History (Reconstruction to present).”

In one brief segment within the high school historical perspective strand, a few modestly specific fragments of content appear. Students might “explain how the rise of big business, factories, mechanized farming, and the labor movement have [*sic*] impacted the lives of Americans.” Or they might “examine the impact of massive immigration (e.g., new social patterns, conflicts in ideas about national unity amid growing cultural diversity) after the Civil War,” or “explain and evaluate the impact of significant social, political and economic changes during the Progressive Movement (e.g., industrial capitalism, urbanization, political corruption, [and] initiation of reforms), World War I (e.g., imperialism to isolationism, nationalism) and the Twenties (e.g., economic prosperity, consumerism, [and] women’s suffrage).” After World War II, they might discuss suburbanization, civil rights, and “conflicts over political issues (e.g., McCarthyism, U.S. involvement in Vietnam).” Shorn of all context or explanation, however, such content is unlikely to clarify the broader scope of American history for students, or help teachers organize effective courses.

## Content and Rigor Conclusion

Kentucky's vague and inconsistent effort to lay out broad thematic concepts for American history fails to provide teachers with any useful guidance on historical content. Occasional fragments of substantive outlining appear in eighth grade and in high school, but these only hint at chronology or context. The level of rigor expected or required at particular grade levels is difficult to discern, since the content itself is both hit-or-miss and confusingly organized. It is nearly impossible to understand how teachers could use these documents to organize their courses or determine student proficiency. The state earns only a two out of seven for Content and Rigor. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

## Clarity and Specificity Conclusion

The Kentucky standards obscure and decontextualize the specific details of American history in a maze of jargon, charts, skills, concepts, and assessments. The standards are historically vague, disorganized, and incoherent. Teachers will find it difficult to determine what U.S. history content is essential and what specifically should be taught at which grade level; they will search in vain for a practical level of historical specificity and chronology or a clear and usable scope and sequence. Kentucky earns one out of three for Clarity and Specificity. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

# LOUISIANA • U.S. HISTORY



GRADE

**C**

SCORES

Content and Rigor **4/7**  
Clarity and Specificity **1/3**

TOTAL SCORE

**5/10**

## Overview

Louisiana offers a confusing dichotomy between its overarching benchmarks and its more specific grade-level expectations; each defines different and sometimes contradictory grade-level course content. Most U.S. history substance appears in the expectations, but detail and quality are erratic. On balance, isolated patches of excellence do not create a consistently solid content outline.

## Goals and Organization

The first section of Louisiana’s social studies standards is divided into four strands: geography, civics, economics, and history. Each is in turn divided into grade blocks (K–4, 5–8, and 9–12), for which the state provides target “benchmarks”—broad descriptions of what students should know and be able to do in each grade band.

A second section, organized entirely differently, sets out grade-specific expectations for K–8; the grade-level expectations for each grade are again divided among the four strands. At the high school level, the strands are separated into subject-specific courses, and the expectations are provided by course rather than grade.

From Kindergarten through fourth grade, the benchmarks introduce concepts of chronology, the nature of primary and secondary sources, and the different perspectives of different groups. The grade-level expectations add references to historic symbols, holidays, American democracy, etc.

Strangely, starting in fifth grade, the content and sequence defined in the benchmarks *do not match* those outlined in the grade-level expectations. The benchmarks explicitly cover *all* of American history in fifth through eighth grades, and briefly recapitulate earlier periods at the high school level before moving to the twentieth century. But the expectations split U.S. history content across grades five, seven, and high school, with fifth grade running to the Revolution, seventh grade spanning from the Revolution to 1877, and the high school U.S. history course covering from 1877 to the present.

## Evaluation

Louisiana insists that its social studies framework is intended only as a “blueprint” for local curricula “and promotes local flexibility in curricular design, course sequence, assessment methods, and instructional strategies...A reasonable balance between breadth of content and depth of inquiry must be achieved.”

### DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

Louisiana Content Standards, Benchmarks, and Grade Level Expectations for Social Studies, U.S. history segments (2005)

Accessed from:

<http://www.doa.louisiana.gov/osr/lac/28V121/28v121.pdf>

Yet no standards can provide clear expectations for schools when the overview benchmarks and specific grade-level expectations contradict each other even as to the content of each year's scope.

The broad benchmarks describe rather than detail the knowledge that students should acquire. For instance, students in Kindergarten through fourth grade are to understand “that people in different times and places view the world differently.” They are also to explore the development of democratic principles, as “exemplified by historic figures, events, and symbols” (not specified), as well as understand “the causes and nature of various movements of large groups of people into and within Louisiana and the United States throughout history” (not specified).

For grades five through eight, the benchmarks are divided into conventional historical eras: “Three Worlds Meet” (to 1620), “Colonization and Settlement (1565–1763),” “Revolution and the New Nation (1754–1820s),” and so on to the present. Directives are especially brief for the twentieth century, but remain exceedingly broad throughout. For instance, students are expected to explain “the causes and course of the American Revolution and the reasons for the American victory,” “the impact of the American Revolution on the politics, society, and economy of the new nation,” and how “the institutions and practices of government established during and after the American Revolution” relate “to the foundation of the American political system.” The benchmarks for grades nine through twelve briefly reconsider the period from pre-colonization, but focus mainly on the twentieth century. Here, for example, students are asked to explain “the economic, political, social, and cultural transformation of the United States since World War II.”

Such benchmarks provide only the most basic checklist with which to structure a course. They are supplemented by the grade-level expectations but, as noted above, the sequence outlined by the expectations is *not the same* as that which the benchmarks describe. The expectations are more thorough than the benchmarks, though detail is still generally thin.

According to the fifth grade expectations, students are to describe pre-contact American cultures and early global trade ties; compare and contrast European, African, and Native American cultures; describe the Spanish conquests in the Americas; and describe the rise of the slave system. The topics are relatively few, and tend to remain general; for example, students are asked to describe “the political, social, and economic organization and structure of the thirteen British colonies.” The expectations often touch on key points, such as how European culture, politics, and institutions were reflected

in American life, or why some colonists rebelled while others remained loyal. But detail and explanation are meager at best.

In the document detailing grade-level expectations, seventh-grade U.S. history picks up at the American Revolution, where fifth grade left off, and continues to 1877—even though, according to the benchmarks, grades five through eight continue up to the present.

Unfortunately, the seventh grade substantive outline is bewilderingly inconsistent. Hardly a single specific event or person is mentioned before 1800; instead, students are simply told to understand the American Revolution and early federal eras. Yet the section beginning with the Louisiana Purchase marks the standards' high point, laying out the War of 1812 (including sectional divisions over the war and the British alliance with Native American groups); the Monroe Doctrine; western migration and Native American policy; Manifest Destiny; Texas independence and the Mexican War; Jacksonian democracy and Native American removal; technological change; national policy on banking, tariffs, and internal improvements; and so forth. Even the conflict between immediate and gradual emancipationists is mentioned, a key issue hardly ever raised in school standards.

This substantive burst fades with the coming of the Civil War. Vague directives to explain “the impact of the compromises on the issue of slavery and the *Dred Scott* decision on increasing tensions between the North and South” and “the immediate and long-term causes of the secession of the Southern states and the outbreak of the Civil War” cannot make up for omitted events such as the Missouri Compromise, the nullification crisis, the Compromise of 1850, and the Kansas-Nebraska Act. This unevenness continues: A broad directive to discuss the course, conduct, and long-term impact of the Civil War is placed alongside an admirably specific reference to the Emancipation Proclamation, conflicting Reconstruction plans, tensions between Andrew Johnson and the Congress, the election of 1876, and the Compromise of 1877.

The high school U.S. history expectations run from 1877 to the present. Here the benchmarks specify a review of earlier periods, but the expectations do not.

The expectations for high school echo the problems found in seventh grade but reveal far fewer bright spots. Students are to examine the rise of industry and big business and how they changed American society, “the changing relationship between the federal government and private industry,” “the phases, geographic origins, and motivations behind mass migration to and within the United States,” and more. But no historical or explanatory detail is provided for *any* of these broad topics. This vague approach continues to characterize coverage from

World War I through the New Deal and World War II. Again, students are simply directed to explain why a large-scale event or issue—like the Great Depression or World War II—occurred. There is factual carelessness as well: “Threats to civil liberties” are wrongly placed in the 1920s, while Woodrow Wilson—who in fact oversaw the Sedition Act and the First Red Scare—is mentioned only as a Progressive reformer. The post-World War II period is rushed and often chronologically confused. For example, the end of the Cold War appears before discussion of the Great Society.

## Content and Rigor Conclusion

Louisiana’s benchmarks are vague and general, providing only the broadest outline of required content. Most of the standards’ substance appears instead in the grade-level expectations. Unfortunately, the expectations not only contradict the scope of the benchmarks, but also are wildly inconsistent in quality. The level of substantive detail is sometimes adequate, occasionally even impressive. But, far too often, the expectations constitute little more than directives to “describe” or “explain” a period or event with few or no specifics. Since the content detail is so variable, no single grade maintains a consistently solid level of rigor. The decision—at least as the expectations are organized—to split American history content across grades five, seven, and high school is a further blow to substantive rigor; earlier material is relegated to earlier grades, where students’ comprehension, sophistication, and retention are less developed. On balance, Louisiana’s mixed-bag outlines earn a four out of seven for Content and Rigor. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

## Clarity and Specificity Conclusion

The division of Louisiana’s standards between the benchmarks and the grade-level expectations introduces not only confusing overlap but also outright contradiction and mystifying scope and sequence. Readers are left with uncertainty about what is to be specifically taught and when, leaving unclear what knowledge students at various grade levels are expected to have mastered. Except for the high school expectations, content is split among thematic strands, further undermining the clarity and logic of presentation. A visually overcrowded and confusing layout makes it harder still to distinguish among different sections and subsections. The expectations, by themselves, do provide some substantive guidelines to teachers and students—but they are often undermined by inadequate and inconsistent levels of detail. This leads to unclear classroom expectations. The muddled organization leaves the state with a one out of three for Clarity and Specificity. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

# MAINE • U.S. HISTORY



GRADE

**F**

SCORES

Content and Rigor 0/7  
Clarity and Specificity 0/3

TOTAL SCORE

**0/10**

## Overview

Maine, focused on broad social studies themes and categories to the virtual exclusion of content, defines no grade-by-grade sequence or scope and fails to offer even the most basic content outline for U.S. history.

## Goals and Organization

Maine's social studies *Learning Results* are divided into five strands: applications of social studies processes, knowledge, and skills; civics and government; economics; geography; and history. Each strand is broken into thematic subsections. The history strand is divided into "historical knowledge, concepts, themes, and patterns" and "individual, cultural, international, and global connections in history."

With each of these subsections, the state provides, in a series of charts, "performance indicators and descriptors" for each of four grade blocks: pre-K–2, 3–5, 6–8, and 9–diploma. The indicators are broad headings laying out concepts that students should understand; the descriptors provided for each indicator lay out queries for students to address.

A brief list of historical eras (for both U.S. and world history) appears in the introductory section, accompanying a definition of the word "eras." Beyond this, no specific U.S. history is laid out, and no particular periods are assigned to any particular grade.

## Evaluation

Citing "the great architects of American public education"—Jefferson, Mann, and Dewey—the Maine standards insist "that every student must be well versed in our nation's history, the principles and practices which undergird citizenship, and the institutions that define our government." However, in order to assure that history is more than mere "lists of people, events, and dates," the standards recommend "a clear understanding" of the interrelated social studies disciplines of government, history, geography, and economics "as the pillars of content."

We know there's trouble when, in an effort to clarify this admirable goal, the state sets out to translate the word "understand" into social studies jargon. As used in Maine's standards, the word "refers to a variety of different levels on Bloom's taxonomy and was used intentionally to serve as an umbrella term for the cognitive demand that is described by the descriptors beneath the performance indicators"—whatever that may mean.

Worse, while the state takes such pains to explain what it means by "understand," hardly any time is spent on the specific historical substance that must be understood.

### DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

**Maine Learning Results: Parameters for Essential Instruction, Social Studies, U.S. history segments (2007)**

**Accessed from:**

<http://www.maine.gov/education/lres/pei/ss102207.pdf>

Maine’s sole “pillar of content” for U.S. history is a basic list of eras—which is relegated to the introductory text rather than incorporated into the standards themselves: “The Americas to 1600”; “The Colonial Era, 15020–1754”; “The Revolutionary Era, 1754–1783”; “Nation Building, 1783–1815”; and so forth, through to “Contemporary United States, 1961–Present.”

Among the five strands, history ranks last, and there is effectively no guidance as to what actual historical subject matter should be taught.

For the first strand, “social studies processes, knowledge, and skills,” students are to “apply critical thinking, a research process, and discipline-based processes and knowledge from civics/government, economics, geography, and history in authentic contexts.” Yet contexts, “authentic” or otherwise, are not specified. Under civics and government, students are to study the nature of American government and democracy. Apart, however, from a brief reference to federalism and checks and balances, there are no specifics, let alone any history—just hazy directives to understand broad and vaguely defined issues and themes, such as “explain that the *structures* and processes of *government* are described in documents, including the Constitutions of Maine and the United States.”

Of the three sub-units in the civics strand, one focuses on diversity—and the only named group therein is Maine’s Native Americans. Students are to “understand political and civic aspects of unity and diversity in Maine, the United States, and the world, including Maine Native Americans.” There are also diversity subunits in the economics and geography strands, and again, Maine’s Native Americans are the only group specifically mentioned. Students are merely to “understand economic aspects” and “geographic aspects” of unity and diversity, “including Maine Native Americans.”

The history strand for all of K–12 comprises just over two pages. Students, according to the strand’s heading, are to “draw on concepts and processes from history to develop *historical* perspective and understand issues of continuity and change in the community, Maine, the United States, and world.” They are evidently to do this without learning specific historical content, however, since no substance whatsoever is defined in the charts that follow. And, since no historical substance is specified, no distinction is even made between American and world history.

Under the first of two subsections in the history strand, “historical knowledge, concepts, themes, and patterns,” students are directed to “understand” concepts of chronology and causality. For example, in the “performance indicators and descriptors” provided for this sub-unit, students in grades three through five are to “identify various major *historical* eras,

major enduring themes, turning points, events, consequences, persons, and timeframes, in the history of the community, Maine, and the United States.” No further information is offered. At the high school level, students shall “Analyze and critique major *historical* eras, major enduring themes, turning points, events, consequences, and people in the history of the United States and world and the implications for the present and future.” Note that students are expected not merely to analyze but to “critique” the past—reflecting the modern tendency toward “presentism” (whereby students judge the past through the lens of today’s values, standards, and norms) and personal relevance that is evident throughout the document.

The second history subsection is “individual, cultural, international, and global connections in history.” Note that individual perspectives are listed first: Students are again encouraged to see the past principally in terms of themselves. Directives throughout the subsection remain broad: The overall aim is for students to “understand *historical* aspects of unity and diversity.” For example, students in sixth through eighth grades are asked to “identify and compare a variety of cultures through time, including comparisons of native and immigrant groups in the United States, and eastern and western societies [*sic*] in the world.” In high school, they are to “identify and critique issues characterized by unity and diversity in the history of the United States and other nations, and describe their effects.”

The closest to any specific content remains the admonition, at every grade level in this subsection, to study aspects of Native American culture—though even this narrow scrap of substance consists only of vague references to “various cultural traditions and contributions” and “major turning points and events” for Maine Native Americans (in all grades) and Native Americans generally (only in high school). The only other groups alluded to are “various”—but unnamed—“historical and recent immigrant groups.”

## Content and Rigor Conclusion

If Maine teachers, students, and parents are looking for substantive learning parameters and essential instructional guidelines in U.S. history in their state’s standards, they will come up empty-handed. There is, for all practical purposes, no content at all. And, since no content is defined, rigor is meaningless. Finally, the reliance on personal relevance as a tool for judging the past all but guarantees that students will never achieve historical understanding—no matter how many “descriptors” are in place “to define the level of cognitive demand for student performance.” Maine’s historically hollow standards earn a zero out of seven for Content and Rigor. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

## Clarity and Specificity Conclusion

The Maine standards aim to achieve “essential instruction” and measurable “learning results.” The reality, unfortunately, is that the standards amount to little more than muddled, incoherent, and substance-free jargon. There is no credible and/or specific historical scope or sequence, and it is all but impossible to determine what is being asked of either teachers or students at any grade level. Samson would have no problem bringing down Maine’s “pillars of content”: They are made of paper and built on sand. The state earns a zero out of three for Clarity and Specificity. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

# MARYLAND • U.S. HISTORY



GRADE

C

SCORES

Content and Rigor 3/7  
Clarity and Specificity 2/3

TOTAL SCORE

5/10

## Overview

Maryland's preference for thematic organization over chronology, together with a frequent lack of detail, results in confusing and fragmentary outlines that obscure historical sequence and comprehension. The state further undermines its content with a poor choice of sequence: It offers a single U.S. history course split over grades five, eight, and high school. This decision is made worse by the state's failure to specify any review of earlier content in later grades.

## Goals and Organization

Maryland's social studies standards for grades pre-K–8 are divided into five strands (called "content standards"): political science, peoples of the nation and world, geography, economics, and history. Each strand is further subdivided into thematic subheadings, and grade-specific skills and learning expectations are presented in charts for each subheading.

At the high school level, the strands are replaced with subject-specific courses. History course outlines are divided by chronological or thematic subdivisions, which are then supplied with course-specific content expectations, or "objectives." The objectives note parenthetically which of the five strands pertain to their content.

From pre-Kindergarten through third grade, concepts of chronology, timelines, and the distinction between "past and present time" are introduced. Maryland's history is introduced in fourth grade.

The U.S. history standards are split into a single course over grades five, eight, and high school. Fifth grade runs from colonization to the Revolution; eighth grade continues to 1877, and high school to the present. No review of earlier periods is specified.

## Evaluation

Maryland's history strand asserts that students "will use historical thinking skills" to "examine significant ideas, beliefs, and themes; organize patterns and events; and analyze how individuals and societies have changed over time in Maryland and the United States."

Regrettably, however, history is listed last among Maryland's social studies strands and historical thinking is often subordinated to broader conceptual themes while detail and specifics receive short shrift. Also, because Maryland has split U.S. history content across three grades, fifth grade provides the only coverage of American history through the Revolution—and it does so with patchy detail and inadequate depth. Broad headings mention—but barely explicate—early colonial settlements; the growth and regional development of the colonies; the "different roles and viewpoints of individuals and groups,

### ✓ DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

**Maryland Voluntary State Curriculum: Social Studies (Pre-K–8) and High School United States History, U.S. history segments (2006, curricula mandatory effective July 2009)**

**Accessed from:**

[http://mdk12.org/instruction/curriculum/social\\_studies/index.html](http://mdk12.org/instruction/curriculum/social_studies/index.html)

such as women, men, free and enslaved Africans, and Native Americans during the Revolutionary period”; and the causes and effects of the American Revolution. Related content is also divided arbitrarily among the various strands. The rise of representative assemblies and town meetings appears in the political science standard, which likewise directs attention (without specifics) to the influence of European philosophy, regional factors, and class interests on American ideas. It also lists key founding documents and selected founders, as well as the Federalists and Anti-Federalists. Additional historical content is cut and pasted into the peoples of the nation, geography, and economics strands, making it extremely difficult for teachers or students to understand how historical lives and events actually interrelate.

When U.S. history resumes in eighth grade, the material is broken up and decontextualized in much the same way. For example, the Articles of Confederation, the Constitution, and early Supreme Court decisions appear only in the political science strand. Cultural and ethnic conflict, immigration and nativism appear under “peoples of the nation.” Points such as regional differences, the Louisiana Purchase, and migration crop up under geography, while regional economic goals and resources, technology, early industrialization, trade, protectionism, and banks appear under economics. Specific events are sometimes mentioned in these thematically-arranged fragments, but specific people are not.

The eighth-grade history strand is more sophisticated than the fifth grade strand, but it *begins* with the Louisiana Purchase and Manifest Destiny. Not only are all earlier periods relegated to fifth grade, the 1790s and election of 1800 appear in *neither* course. Despite some improvement in depth, the eighth grade post-1800 standards are themselves spotty, sorely lacking in detail, and organized too often by theme rather than chronology, making chaotic nonsense of historical development and interconnections. The Jacksonian era, for instance, segues directly to Reconstruction. A section on the “conflict between ideas and institutions” then jumps back to the effects of the American Revolution, foreign policy from 1812 to the Mexican War, industrialization, the expansion of slavery, sectionalism, abolitionism and “the other reform movements.” A catch-all Civil War section jumbles the Constitution’s three-fifths clause, the 1820 Missouri Compromise, the Compromise of 1850, the 1798–99 Virginia-Kentucky resolutions, the 1814 Hartford Convention, nullification, political party divisions, Dred Scott, John Brown, the election of 1860, and secession—in *that order*. The Civil War itself is tossed off with a directive to “identify the goals, resources and strategies of the North and the South” and a discussion of Lincoln’s use of black regiments. This organizational scheme may make sense to social studies planners, but it is not history education.

In high school, remarkably, those tangled strands are abandoned in favor of a straight, largely chronological history course. But sadly, nothing before 1877 is studied again at this level, and the standards remain uneven—guidelines are broad, and specifics and real people are barely present. For example, the aftermath of Reconstruction refers to presidential vs. congressional reconstruction plans, but mentions no people or details (President Andrew Johnson does not merit an appearance). The rise of Jim Crow lumps together everything from the 1866 Black Codes to the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision.

The sections on the rise of *laissez-faire* capitalism and industrialism are stronger, and they make it possible for students to understand the later responses from government, labor, and the Populists. Events up to World War I are described in reasonable detail (the wartime crackdowns on civil liberties are, unusually, directly associated with the Woodrow Wilson administration). For the 1920s and the Great Depression, the content items again become broader, but do provide a generally coherent framework. After World War II, thematic agglomerations again undermine chronology. In a section on foreign relations, the Vietnam War and the 1960s appear before Sputnik, and the September 11 attacks appear before the Reagan administration. The standards also remain averse to mentioning important individuals: Why, for instance, is the Great Society referred to by name, but Lyndon Johnson is not?

## Content and Rigor Conclusion

Like a number of other states (including Indiana and Kansas, which, according to Maryland’s website, “were used as benchmarks for comparison”), Maryland made the unfortunate decision to split the U.S. history content across grades five, eight, and high school. While there is a dramatic change in students’ intellectual maturity across those grades, the Maryland standards only tacitly acknowledge students’ developing sophistication by increasing the substance and rigor of the standards across grades. But even in relation to their assigned grade levels, the earlier courses are inadequate as they stand. Their relentlessly thematic organization disrupts almost all sense of chronology or historical development, and their shallow coverage provides limited guidance to teachers or students. The high school course is in many respects superior, providing a history curriculum with some coherence. Yet even here, a frequent preference for theme over chronology results in some disordering of events, and the level of detail frequently remains skimpy. On balance, Maryland’s disjointed and fragmentary standards earn a three out of seven for Content and Rigor. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

## Clarity and Specificity Conclusion

Despite its flaws, Maryland's U.S. history sequence is fairly straightforward with the scope of each grade plainly defined. Yet the relentless splitting of material into strands through eighth grade undermines the clarity and utility of the outlines, and preference for theme over chronology creates confusion at the high school level as well. Detail is in short supply at all levels. Maryland's usable but problematic standards barely earn a two out of three for Clarity and Specificity. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

# MASSACHUSETTS • U.S. HISTORY



GRADE

**A-**

SCORES

Content and Rigor **6/7**  
Clarity and Specificity **3/3**

TOTAL SCORE

**9/10**

## Overview

The Massachusetts U.S. history standards offer clear, comprehensible outlines, rigorously focused on historical substance and comprehension. Despite occasional omissions and weak spots, the content is detailed and sophisticated, offering explanation and context as well as lists—a model of how history standards should be organized.

## Goals and Organization

The Massachusetts history and social science standards present—in a single, straightforward document—grade-by-grade standards for grades K–7, and subject-specific course outlines for grades 8–12. Each grade (K–7) begins with a short “concepts and skills” section which lays out broad skills and concepts (use of maps, defining constitutional government or market economies, etc.) for history and geography, civics and government, and economics. This is followed by “learning standards” which are divided into chronological/thematic historical headings supplied with specific content standards. The learning standards are arranged purely by subject matter, with no division into fixed strands. For the upper-level (8–12) courses, the concepts and skills section is dropped, and only learning standards are provided. An “overview of scope and sequence” provides capsule summaries of the content of each grade or course, and each has its own introduction summarizing grade or course goals.

Famous Americans are introduced from Kindergarten through second grade, along with national symbols, democracy and citizenship, American diversity, and civic responsibility. Third grade introduces Massachusetts history, and fourth grade presents the geography and demographics of the Americas.

The U.S. history sequence begins in fifth grade and runs from pre-settlement through the Civil War. A two-year U.S. history course follows and is placed, at the discretion of individual school districts, between eighth and eleventh grades (with placement of both halves of the course in high school recommended, but not required). The U.S. History I course runs from 1763 to 1877, and U.S. History II from 1877 to the present.

## Evaluation

The Massachusetts framework begins with a refreshingly candid assertion, rejecting the trendy cultural and historical relativism so often found in American education: “Democracy is the worthiest form of human governance ever conceived.” However, this statement entails no smug triumphalism or entitlement. The state believes the chief values of democracy “must be taught and learned and practiced. They cannot be taken for

### DOCUMENTS REVIEWED<sup>1</sup>

**Massachusetts History and Social Science Curriculum Framework, U.S. history segments (2003)**

**Accessed from:**

<http://www.doe.mass.edu/frameworks/hss/final.pdf>

<sup>1</sup> The Massachusetts social studies standards have not changed since our last evaluation, *Effective State Standards for U.S. History: A 2003 Report Card*. The state received the same score (roughly 90%) in each review. However, for this review, we changed our grading scale. In the 2003 review, a 90/100 yielded an A. In this review, a 9/10 yields an A-. For complete discussion of our 2011 grading metric, see Appendix A. For complete discussion of the 2003 grading metric, see: <http://www.edexcellence.net/publications-issues/publications/effectivestatehistory.html>.

granted or regarded as merely one set of options against which any other may be accepted as equally worthy.”

The focus of the Massachusetts framework is on history in context: a substantive curriculum based on historical knowledge. While there are civics, geography, and economics units in the concepts and skills segments, these are short, introducing specific and limited concepts from those disciplines. The learning standards keep history together as history. Each grade or course is given a textual introduction, laying out its key issues and objectives.

A rejection of presentism—whereby students might judge the past through the lens of today’s values, standards, and norms—is evident from the earliest grades. Diversity, though emphasized, is framed by *e pluribus unum*—out of many, one—emphasizing common American heritage, democracy, and citizenship. The third grade local history course highlights connections to local museums and historical societies, an excellent way to engage younger students’ interest.

There are, however, several problems with Massachusetts’s approach. One appears immediately in the introduction to the fifth grade U.S. history standards: While U.S. history from the American Revolution onward is covered again in later grades, the pre-1763 colonial period is *only* covered in fifth grade, a serious flaw given the limited sophistication of eleven-year-old students. It is also odd that the fifth grade course covers only the period before the Civil War. It would be better if the two-year advanced curriculum were explicitly placed in high school (as the standards recommend) and a second introductory year were placed in sixth, seventh, or eighth grade.

The fifth-grade standards are notably substantive and detailed—arguably too much so for the age level. Yet their frequent inclusion of *explanatory* statements—explicating the meaning and importance of the outlined events—makes it far more likely that the material will be effectively taught and understood. Context and balance are consistently emphasized: European exploration and settlement is comprehensively examined and England’s predominant influence in North America is clearly explained; the rise of slavery is treated alongside colonial assemblies, town meetings, and the founding of colonial colleges.

The Revolutionary crisis is traced to the French and Indian War—a key issue frequently neglected in many state standards—and the key British acts that followed are carefully enumerated. The ideas of the Declaration of Independence are explained, and the important 1780 Massachusetts Constitution is specifically discussed. Students are introduced to the Articles of Confederation, Shays’ Rebellion, significant issues of the Constitutional

Convention, the Bill of Rights, and the basic principles of American democracy. The outline (running to the Civil War) tapers off dramatically in the 1790s and thereafter, but many key points are still touched upon—and, of course, the period from the American Revolution onward will be covered again in later grades.

The U.S. History I course (the first part of the two-year middle/high school course) continues to provide high-quality guidance, integrating relevant primary source documents. Massachusetts’s role in the American Revolution is emphasized, as are the “major debates” at the Constitutional Convention (“the distribution of political power; the rights of individuals; the rights of states; [and] slavery”)—a further effort to encourage understanding as well as factual knowledge. Students read “Federalist 10” when studying the ratification debates; the reasons for the Bill of Rights are discussed. A unit on the nature of American government—which many states separate into a civics strand—is sensibly placed here.

Regrettably, from this point on, the standards become increasingly rushed. Some crucial events of the 1790s, omitted in fifth grade, do appear here: the rise of parties, the Jefferson/Hamilton schism, and the Alien and Sedition Acts. But coverage of the 1790s and early nineteenth century is spotty. The election of 1800 is missing; likewise Lewis and Clark, who are mentioned in fourth grade. The expansion of suffrage is commendably bolstered by readings from Tocqueville. But political history tends to be the weakest link; for instance, events running from the War of 1812 to the 1853–54 Gadsden Purchase are merely listed in a catch-all unit on westward expansion and “growing diplomatic assertiveness.”

Stronger units follow on economic, social, and religious change. The coming of the Civil War receives less explanatory effort than some earlier periods, although pivotal events are carefully listed (including such oft-overlooked items as the Wilmot Proviso and *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*). Students read Lincoln’s speeches to understand his ideas and leadership, yet coverage of the war itself is brief. Reconstruction is outlined comprehensively, including Andrew Johnson’s impeachment, the Compromise of 1877, and the rise of Jim Crow.

In U.S. History II, with a huge volume of material to cover, the trend toward lists and away from explanation continues. The lists, however, are fairly complete, and still include some explanatory description; primary documents continue to be integrated. Solid coverage of Progressivism includes an unusual discussion of early civil rights struggles. Unfortunately, political history remains skimpy; few individuals are mentioned and political issues are treated very broadly.

Coverage of the Great Depression’s roots and consequences (including ideas of major economists) is more solid. The origins of World War II are well handled and, while the conduct of the war is hardly mentioned, the home front is described in detail. After the start of the Cold War, events seem more rushed than ever—most of the U.S.-Soviet rivalry is dealt with via a simple list of hot-spots from Korea to Vietnam; the end of the Cold War appears *before* a somewhat disorganized section on domestic affairs, running from the baby boom to Watergate. The Reagan and Clinton eras are covered in unusual detail, as is the 2000 election.

The standards conclude with very useful appendices, including a comprehensive bibliography—a welcome feature, encouraging teachers to expand their own knowledge—lists of key primary documents, and lists of local museums, archives, and historical societies.

### Content and Rigor Conclusion

Despite some gaps and weaknesses—particularly in content beyond the mid-nineteenth century—the Massachusetts U.S. history standards maintain an impressive level of substantive rigor, free from thematic strands, and include laudable use of primary source readings. Much of the framework is outstanding, providing historical *explanation* as well as a robust factual outline. The fifth grade course may be too advanced for the age level, but the ample provision of such explanatory and expository content items makes the curriculum far more useable. The failure to recap pre-Revolutionary America in later grades is more problematic. Still, despite its handful of flaws, Massachusetts unquestionably sets a high bar for history education, laying out material with a depth and substance rarely seen in school standards. It comfortably earns a six out of seven for Content and Rigor. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

### Clarity and Specificity Conclusion

The Massachusetts framework is refreshingly straightforward, supplying clear and simple outlines on which to structure actual classes. The scope of each course is plainly defined, with ample detail and clear expectations. Content is laid out comprehensively, with an almost total absence of jargon. The content of each grade or course is neatly summarized in the introductory material, and the outline for each is logical, coherent, and visually clean. Throughout, the manifest purpose is not to expound educational theory, but to provide an easy-to-use guide for real historical education. The state deserves a three out of three for Clarity and Specificity. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

# MICHIGAN • U.S. HISTORY



GRADE

**B**

SCORES

Content and Rigor **5/7**  
Clarity and Specificity **2/3**

TOTAL SCORE

**7/10**

## Overview

Michigan’s U.S. history standards, seeking to avoid both theoretical generalizations and overly confining content outlines, produce a curious result: Many of the historical content items raise important and sophisticated issues, but—especially before the high school level—supporting and explanatory detail is frequently lacking. Local districts and teachers will have to pick up the slack themselves in order to develop rigorous U.S. history courses from these intelligent yet overly broad outlines.

## Goals and Organization

Michigan’s social studies standards offer grade-specific content expectations for grades K–8. Each grade-level outline is divided into four strands—history, geography, civics/government, and economics—each of which is further subdivided thematically or chronologically and is supplied with grade-specific content expectations.

At the high school level, standards are organized by course (World History and Geography, U.S. History and Geography, Civics, and Economics), rather than by grade or strand.

Kindergarten through second grade cover broad social studies concepts, such as “places and regions,” “human systems,” and “purpose of government.” Third grade focuses on “Michigan Studies,” a general overview of the state through its admission to statehood. Fourth grade is described as “United States Studies,” but actually continues its overview of Michigan, using “examples from Michigan history (from statehood to the present) as a case study for learning about United States geography, economics, and government.”

The U.S. history sequence is treated as a single course, divided among grades five, eight, and high school. Fifth grade runs from pre-settlement to 1800, and eighth grade from 1754 to 1898. The high school U.S. history course briefly reviews the period to 1877, then continues to the present.

## Evaluation

Michigan’s standards commendably recognize that when “standards documents stress ‘thinking’ at the expense of ‘substance,’ teachers and educational critics often argue these appear vague and offer little guidance for deciding what content should be taught and tested.” But they also assert that “standards that specify more substantive detail face their own critics who argue that such detail is too prescriptive.” Michigan’s standards claim to bridge this gap with a balance of age-appropriate and grade-specific content and skills that nurture historical “habits of mind” that enable students to move from inquiry to analysis, interpretation, and understanding.

### DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

**Michigan Social Studies Grade Level Content Expectations: K–8, U.S. history segments (2007)**

*Accessed from:*

[http://www.michigan.gov/documents/mde/SSGLCE\\_218368\\_7.pdf](http://www.michigan.gov/documents/mde/SSGLCE_218368_7.pdf)

**Michigan High School Social Studies Content Expectations, U.S. history segments (2008)**

*Accessed from:*

[http://www.michigan.gov/documents/mde/SS\\_HSCE\\_210739\\_7.pdf](http://www.michigan.gov/documents/mde/SS_HSCE_210739_7.pdf)

The result of such hedging is, predictably, a curious amalgam of valuable substance and worrisome omission.

Early grades emphasize standard-issue social studies concepts of place, people, time, and government; third and fourth grades are largely limited to Michigan's own past. But, by fifth grade, where the U.S. history curriculum is introduced, the standards announce "a departure from the social studies approach taken in previous grades...to a more disciplinary-centered approach concentrating on the early history of the United States."

Following a concise narrative introduction to the period, the fifth grade course is divided into three historical eras: Beginnings to 1620; Colonization and Settlement (1585–1763); and Revolution and the New Nation (1754–1800). These are subdivided into chronological and thematic headings, such as "American Indian Life in the Americas" and "European Exploration," touching on colonization and cultural contact, the European contest for North America, slavery, colonial life, the roots and consequences of the Revolution, and on through to the Constitution.

Significant historical substance is outlined. Students are, for example, to "describe the development of government including establishment of town meetings, development of colonial legislatures and growth of royal government"; to "describe the role of the French and Indian War, how British policy toward the colonies in America changed from 1763–1775, and colonial dissatisfaction with the new policy"; or, to "describe the issues over representation and slavery the Framers faced at the Constitutional Convention and how they were addressed in the Constitution."

Despite such intelligent summary points, there are failings in detail. The standards do not, for instance, describe what British policies *were*, or *how* they were rooted in the French and Indian War. Students are told to discuss the triangular trade's "trade routes," but the standards do not specify what they were. They are expected to discuss how "immigration patterns" led to "ethnic diversity in the Middle Colonies"—without being told what immigrant groups were arriving. The standards lay out many important and sophisticated historical questions, but too often fail to supply supporting detail. Curriculum writers and teachers will have to fill in the gaps if students are to address the issues raised.

The same pattern persists in eighth-grade U.S. history—although, strangely, the useful narrative introduction is omitted. The course is divided into four partly overlapping "eras": 1754–1800s, 1792–1861, 1850–1877, and 1870–1898. Again, there are lists of thoughtful and intelligent content items: "explain the development of the power of the Supreme Court through the doctrine of judicial review, citing *Marbury*

*v. Madison*, *McCulloch v. Maryland*, and *Dartmouth College v. Woodward*"; or "describe the competing views of Calhoun, Webster, and Clay on the nature of the union among the states (e.g., sectionalism, nationalism, federalism, [and] states' rights)." But again, there are serious gaps in supporting detail. The basic facts of the sectional crisis must, for instance, be learned before the competing views of leading statesmen can make sense. A brief listing of events from the Missouri Compromise to the *Dred Scott* decision offers a checklist, but no explanation or context.

The third and final portion of the U.S. history sequence, offered at the high school level, briefly recaps the period prior to 1877, then provides a generally solid six-page content outline for the period from 1877 to the present. Many of the eleven largely chronological topics (from the growth of industrial and urban America through changes in America's role in the world since 1980) are admirably rich. Supporting detail is better integrated than in earlier grades. The content items are often phrased in a more explanatory and expository manner—although specific events are still too often mentioned without being defined, and historical figures are rarely referenced.

A useful item, for instance, mentions "consequences of New Deal policies" and provides explanatory examples: "promoting workers' rights, development of the Social Security program, banking and financial regulation, conservation practices, [and] crop subsidies." Another asks students to discuss post-World War II policy decisions and legislative actions, listing rarely-mentioned specifics: "G.I. Bill of Rights (1944), Taft-Hartley Act (1947), Twenty-Second Amendment to the U.S. Constitution (1951), Federal Highways Act (1956), [and] National Defense Act (1957)." A weaker example asks students to discuss urbanization and "the resulting tensions among and within groups," without specifying any such groups. Another asks students to "explain the causes of World War I, [and] the reasons for American neutrality and eventual entry into the war," without any further information. Such content items outline many key issues and themes—but they would be far stronger and more useful if they went beyond *mentioning* such issues and *explained* them as well.

## Content and Rigor Conclusion

Michigan's standards offer largely content-oriented U.S. history standards that provide a serious start at building historical understanding. Unfortunately, while the content expectations outline many of the key issues in America's story, they frequently fail to provide explanatory detail. Seeking to avoid both social studies generalizations and overly confining guidelines, Michigan has found a curious middle ground, promoting serious historical inquiry without adequately

defining historical content. This odd amalgam, rich yet full of holes, is boosted by the more comprehensive high school outline to a five out of seven in Content and Rigor. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

### **Clarity and Specificity Conclusion**

The scope and sequence of the Michigan’s standards reflects the deliberate choice, beginning in fifth grade U.S. history, to depart from “the social studies approach” and adopt “a more disciplinary-centered approach.” Jargon is avoided in favor of substantive discussion, and the *Content Expectations* do challenge students to deal with sophisticated content—yet, especially in elementary and middle school, they do not adequately outline the content that students are expected to learn, leaving course scope ill-defined. The sometimes excellent substance and detail are somewhat uneven, leaving teachers to fill in the gaps when structuring their courses. On balance, Michigan earns a two out of three for Clarity and Specificity. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

# MINNESOTA • U.S. HISTORY



## GRADE

C

## SCORES

Content and Rigor 5/7  
Clarity and Specificity 1/3

## TOTAL SCORE

6/10

## Overview

Despite some gaps and omissions, Minnesota has made a genuine effort to include significant substance in its U.S. history standards. Unfortunately, visual presentation is confusing and detail frequently erratic, undermining clarity, context, and chronology. Further, the assignment of courses to broad grade blocks (as opposed to individual grades) makes it unclear exactly what content should be mastered in each grade.

## Goals and Organization

Minnesota divides its history and social studies standards into seven strands: U.S. history, Minnesota history, world history, historical skills, geography, economics, and government and citizenship. Each strand is presented as a unit, broken into sections by grade bands—K–3, 4–8, and 9–12—without individual grade-level standards. (The Minnesota history strand includes standards only for grades 4–8.)

For each such grade band, the content is presented in a table and broken into “strands,” “sub-strands,” “standards,” and “benchmarks.” In addition, the final column provides “examples” for most benchmarks.

In the K–3 block, the U.S. history strand briefly introduces changes in lifestyle between past and present, famous people and events, and the various cultures that converged in North America. A course on Minnesota history appears in grade block 4–8.

The U.S. history strand places a full U.S. history course, from pre-settlement to the present, in grade band 4–8. A second full course, covering the same all-encompassing time span, is placed in grade band 9–12. But, as scope is defined only within age blocks, specific content is not assigned to specific grades.

## Evaluation

The ultimate goal of Minnesota’s U.S. history standards is to help “students understand that the United States is a nation built on ordinary and extraordinary individuals united in an on-going quest for liberty, freedom, justice, and opportunity” and to recognize “how much courage and sacrifice it has taken to win and keep liberty and justice.”

It’s a promising start. The title of Minnesota’s document, furthermore, suggests an unusual distinction between history and the other domains of social studies: History is clearly regarded as primary—the other strands seem intended as subject-specific adjuncts.

A respectable (though sometimes patchy) level of content is included. Unfortunately, the standards’ complicated tabular organization undercuts the clarity of this content. The

## DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

**Minnesota Academic Standards in History and Social Studies, U.S. history segments (2005)**

### Accessed from:

[http://education.state.mn.us/mdeprod/idcplg?IdcService=GET\\_FILE&dDocName=006219&RevisionSelectionMethod=latestReleased&Rendition=primary](http://education.state.mn.us/mdeprod/idcplg?IdcService=GET_FILE&dDocName=006219&RevisionSelectionMethod=latestReleased&Rendition=primary)

separation of the examples from the broader benchmarks tends to turn the examples into visually confusing checklists, lacking context or explanation; detail is too often lacking, especially prior to high school.

Following the conventional content of the early grades, a full U.S. History course is introduced between fourth and eighth grade—though it is not specified how many years the course constitutes, or in what grades it will be taught; it seems such questions are left to the judgment of local districts.

This course opens with important Native American tribes, selected European explorers, conflict and cooperation in cultural contacts, and so forth. Religious, political, and economic motives for European settlement are discussed, as are regional differences among the colonies and the establishment of the slave trade and slavery. Detail often remains skimpy. The bare examples (“Pequot War, French and Indian War,” for example) do not adequately explain “the differences and tensions between the English colonies and American Indian tribes.” After the American Revolution, for which basic events and selected individuals are mentioned, students are to “know reasons why the United States developed the Constitution, including the debates and compromises that led to the final document”—but the “examples” given are both highly selective and torn from context: “Interstate commerce, Shay’s [*sic*] Rebellion, 3/5 Compromise, [and the] Bill of Rights.” The 1790s, when the Constitutional system took hold, are skipped altogether.

Similar segments cover westward expansion, technological change, and the debate over slavery, sectionalism, and secession. But the lists of examples remain fragmentary and often chronologically jumbled. Those for the sectional and secession crisis, for instance, are “Harper’s Ferry, the Missouri Compromise, the Kansas-Nebraska Act, the *Dred Scott* case, [the] rise of the Republican Party, [and] Harriet Beecher Stowe.” Aside from this chronological mishmash, where are the Compromise of 1850 and the Fugitive Slave Act (to name a few examples)? Likewise, the “13<sup>th</sup> Amendment [and] Reconstruction” do not even begin to explain “the aftermath of the [Civil] war and its effects on citizens.”

The post-Reconstruction units are somewhat more comprehensive, covering immigration, industrialization, the rise of Jim Crow, the rise of the labor movement, and Progressivism; through the Great Depression, World War II, and a brief section on the Cold War and civil rights. But selective focus is again a problem. The World War II home front is, for instance, reduced to “Japanese internment, Tuskegee Airmen, and ‘Rosie the Riveter’”—apparently only women and minorities experienced the burdens of the war.

Unlike many other states, the entire span of U.S. history is covered again in high school, though the standards are again silent as to which grades and how many semesters are to be devoted to this subject. The high school standards are far more substantive than those in fourth through eighth grade (the Compromise of 1850 now appears, for example). But detail, though sometimes impressive, remains uneven, and the same organizational faults persist. Examples are needlessly split from the benchmarks into mere checklists lacking explanation or context, while arbitrary thematic divisions and confused chronology undermine historical clarity.

Nonetheless, some of the material included is rarely found in high school standards. The examples for the American Revolution and its aftermath mention the ideas of Locke and Montesquieu, the loyalist perspective, and specific achievements under the Articles of Confederation. In the antebellum period, there are references to the impact of nativism, the free labor versus pro-slavery arguments over slavery in the territories, and Cherokee support for the Confederacy. In the late nineteenth century, the leading role of local and state progressivism is raised. For the Cold War era, the doctrine of “mutually assured destruction” and President Eisenhower’s “military-industrial complex” speech are included.

Unfortunately, a politically tendentious streak, already evident in fourth through eighth grade, continues at the high school level. The course highlights pre-Columbian achievements, but never mentions the role of warfare, slavery, or human sacrifice in those cultures. Students are asked to describe key characteristics of West African kingdoms and the development of the Atlantic slave trade—but nothing is said about those kingdoms’ dominant role in *supplying* the slave trade. As in the earlier grades, the World War II home front is limited to the impact of the war on women, African Americans, and Japanese Americans.

The separate government and citizenship strand contains a good deal of historical material. Some of it also appears in the U.S. history strand, but all of it—such as discussion of the founding documents—arguably should. Regrettably, political bias intrudes again here: In fourth through eighth grade, for instance, students are to “identify people who have dealt with challenges and made a positive difference in other people’s lives.” But in the examples given, apart from Washington, Franklin, Lincoln, and a general reference to the founders and political leaders, *every person named* is a woman or minority (Harriet Tubman, Martin Luther King, Jr., Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce, Sequoyah, George Washington Carver, Clara Barton, Frederick Douglass, Abigail Adams, and Rosa Parks).

## Content and Rigor Conclusion

A great deal of history appears in Minnesota's *Standards*, particularly at the high school level, but it is too often poorly organized, chronologically confused, and divorced from context. Moreover, there is a vast difference between fourth and eighth graders, and the standards do not specify where in this range the first U.S. history course will be taught. These rather broad and patchy standards for grade block 4–8 are arguably more appropriate for fourth or fifth grades than for more sophisticated middle schoolers, though the inadequate context and explanation will be problematic at any age level. Even in the more thorough outline for high school, lists of facts and people seem too often to have been dumped in with inadequate planning, explanation, or contextualization; the tendency to break chronological periods into thematic blocks also disrupts coherence, lumping disparate events together because of artificial thematic similarities. Political bias also makes unwelcome intrusions at all levels, at the expense of balanced historical perspectives. Despite these failings, the standards often contain significant substantive content—though teachers will have to fill the gaps themselves, in order to understand facts and events and connect them to broader themes. Minnesota's flaws lower its score to a five out of seven for Content and Rigor. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

## Clarity and Specificity Conclusion

Minnesota's U.S. history scope and sequence are, unfortunately, none too clear. The use of broad grade bands rather than grade-by-grade curricula makes it difficult to understand what is to be taught when, and how many semesters are to be devoted to any given subject at any given level. The level of detail, though frequently considerable at the high school level, is uneven overall. Organization and presentation cause problems as well: The division of the curriculum into rigid charts of strands, sub-strands, standards, and benchmarks splits historical development into dissociated fragments. These shortcomings are particularly regrettable since Minnesota has, with obvious effort, pulled in an abundance of historical material. It's a pity it isn't presented more coherently. Minnesota's significant organizational weaknesses earn it a one out of three for Clarity and Specificity. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

# MISSISSIPPI • U.S. HISTORY



GRADE

**F**

SCORES

Content and Rigor 1/7  
Clarity and Specificity 1/3

TOTAL SCORE

**2/10**

## Overview

Mississippi’s U.S. history framework offers brief content outlines and mere fragments of historical specifics, arranged with little regard for chronology or coherence. Worse, students aren’t even required to learn the limited content included in these flimsy standards.

## Goals and Organization

Mississippi’s social studies framework is organized into “competencies,” or topics for grades K–8. The state then provides “suggested objectives” for each competency, which constitute the grade-specific expectations.

Four strands—civics, history, geography, and economics—are identified, but neither the grade-level outlines nor the competencies are divided by strand. Instead, relevant strands are noted parenthetically next to each competency. In addition, the K–8 document includes “suggested teaching strategies” and “suggested assessments” for each grade that are linked to the various “competencies” and “objectives.”

The high school standards are organized identically, save that individual grade-level standards are replaced by subject-specific competencies and objectives.

Basic concepts of community, chronology, and citizenship are introduced from Kindergarten through third grade. Fourth grade is devoted to “Mississippi studies.”

Fifth grade introduces a broad “United States studies” course, which touches on America’s founding heritage. Eighth grade covers U.S. history to 1877. “United States History: 1877 to the Present,” a one year course, is offered anywhere in grades nine through twelve.

## Evaluation

The stated goal of the Mississippi social studies framework is to provide the state’s teachers with a “comprehensive and logical” structure for teaching “the knowledge, skills, and understandings pertinent to social studies.” The framework outlines “what students should learn” before graduation in order to become “life-long, responsible, accountable, global citizens in a democratic society.”

In fact, the document never *explicates* in the slightest detail what students should learn. And while the highly general and thematic competencies are required to be taught, the suggested objectives, in which the standards’ minimal specifics appear, are optional for schools and teachers. Thus, eighth graders are, for instance, *required* to “analyze the

### ✓ DOCUMENTS REVIEWED<sup>1</sup>

Mississippi Social Studies Framework and Guide, U.S. history segments (2004)

Accessed from:

<http://www.mde.k12.ms.us/acad/id/curriculum/ss/frame.html>

<sup>1</sup> Mississippi has a set of draft standards, dated 2011, available at: [http://www.mde.k12.ms.us/acad/id/curriculum/ss/History\\_Framework/2010\\_K\\_12\\_Revised\\_Frameworks.pdf](http://www.mde.k12.ms.us/acad/id/curriculum/ss/History_Framework/2010_K_12_Revised_Frameworks.pdf). Since these standards have not yet been formally adopted, and could likely still undergo substantive changes, they were not included in this review.

development of the foundations of American democracy.” Yet teachers may *choose* whether or not to include the Declaration of Independence, Articles of Confederation, Constitution, and Bill of Rights, or Washington, Adams, Jefferson, and the rise of political parties.

The Kindergarten through third grade materials pay brief and general attention to relations among individual, family, and community and to basic notions of chronology and democratic citizenship. In the fourth grade “Mississippi studies” course—*notably not* called history—the only historical content is found in vague directives to “understand” the state’s peoples, their interaction, and key individuals. No specifics are given, and the suggested teaching exercises merely propose activities in which students are to demonstrate knowledge that is never outlined. (For example, it is suggested that students “create an ‘I Am Proud to be a Mississippian’ Booklet.” Yet such celebration is not to be balanced by, for instance, covering the history of slavery in the state, which is never mentioned.)

United States studies—*not* history—is introduced in fifth grade. But it takes the state just two pages (and seven competencies) to articulate all the content for the grade. The first competency directs students to “examine the historical development of the United States of America”; its suggested objectives mention the motives for early settlement, the founding of the British colonies, westward expansion, addition of states and territories, and “past and present patterns of rural/urban migrations.” A second competency asks students to “discover how democratic values were established and...exemplified”; its suggested objectives mention women’s suffrage and civil rights, and “flag, voting, inaugurations, etc.” Similar competencies touch on geography, constitutional government, citizenship, and the effects of technology on the environment.

The suggested teaching strategies—which consume far more space than the standards themselves—add no meaningful specifics. Students might “illustrate and evaluate the meaning of the words and/or phrases” in the Constitution, using “online resources,” “library resources,” and “other acceptable resources,” displaying their findings with “presentation software.” Or they might “compare/contrast a patriot and loyalist through graphic organizers, charts, and journal entries,” or “dramatize events such as the Boston Tea Party, Continental Congress, and signing of the Declaration of Independence.” But how could students be expected to “analyze the strengths and weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation compared to the Constitution through debates, charts, diagrams, and primary resources” when the state standards have never specified any such content?

In eighth grade, United States studies give way to United States history. But any increase in depth or specifics is minimal. The standards still comprise barely two pages and just eight competencies. Fragments of history crop up without context, explanation, or chronological logic, and are divided purely by theme. The first competency focuses on the impact of “geography, economics, and politics” on “the historical development of the United States in the global community.” Its objectives mention, in a seemingly random jumble, pre-Columbian cultures and European exploration, “the causes and effects of the American Revolution,” “how the expansion of slavery led to regional tension,” “the impact of the Civil War and Reconstruction on the United States,” and “the causes and effects of the Civil War,” finally asking students to “examine Reconstruction.” Save for this passing reference, slavery is hardly mentioned, and its particular significance in Mississippi is ignored.

A second competency focuses on democracy, its objectives mentioning—though not identifying or detailing—the founders, founding documents, and rise of political parties. Others touch on “spatial and ecological relationships,” the Constitution, citizenship, economics, and technology. A list of historical shards—“exploration, colonization, immigration, sectionalism, industry in the North vs. agriculture in the South, tariffs, etc.”—appears suddenly under an economics competency, *followed* by a reference to Alexander Hamilton’s policies on the national debt.

The eighth-grade teaching suggestions again expect students to use knowledge never actually covered. Students might make a chart comparing “the lifestyles of New England, Middle, and/or Southern colonists,” or “draw a political cartoon illustrating colonial dissatisfaction with British policy.” This continues, as similar fragments of history appear without context or explanation.

The high school U.S. history course, running from 1877 to the present, is even worse. The outline—barely longer than a page—consists of just six competencies, with almost the entire history of the era shoehorned into the first: “Explain how politics have influenced the domestic development and international relationships of the United States since 1877.” The first of this competency’s two suggested objectives asks students to “explain the emergence of modern America from a domestic perspective”; briefly listed are the frontier, industry and labor, Populism and Progressivism, the women’s movement, the New Deal, and civil rights. The second asks students to “explain the changing role of the United States in world affairs since 1877 through wars, conflicts, and foreign policy”; the accompanying list of conflicts runs from the Spanish American War to the Vietnam War. That’s it. And even these scattered specifics are “optional.”

Further competencies touch on technology, environment, and “social studies tools.” Another, devoted to Americans’ “civic contributions and responsibilities,” expects students to understand “various reform movements,” such as the civil rights, women’s, temperance, and Chicano movements, as well as “the government’s role in various movements” and “the interaction of society, business, and government with the economy of the United States.” An economics competency scatters references to such issues as the Open Door policy, the Great Depression, and the Marshall Plan. The teaching suggestions again contain random references to particular events as part of creative learning exercises. There is never any explanation or context.

### Content and Rigor Conclusion

Mississippi’s framework outlines content for each grade level or course with such broad strokes that it provides no substantive guidance. Students are essentially *told* to understand and analyze what happened and why—with no details or specifics beyond occasional, decontextualized references to the most general issues or events. The suggested teaching exercises seem to assume that course content does or will exist, but none is ever outlined. Grade-level appropriateness is moot, since content is equally absent at every age level. Mississippi’s scant references to actual history earn it a one out seven for Content and Rigor. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

### Clarity and Specificity Conclusion

The structure of Mississippi’s framework is reasonably straightforward: It is organized grade-by-grade or course-by-course, each grade or course being given a single content outline, not broken into strands. However, this organizational clarity achieves nothing, since the course outlines provide such meager specifics. The scope of each course is sketched so broadly as to be all but meaningless; detail is minimal and fragmentary. The so-called “competencies” offer only overarching directives to understand vast swaths of otherwise unspecified history—and districts and schools may use these in whatever order, sequence, or manner they choose. Most of the framework is devoted to suggested classroom exercises, often little more than games, meant to build on content that students are somehow, somewhere to have acquired—if they are lucky, from teachers with the knowledge and skill to build a curriculum on their own initiative. Mississippi’s largely empty frameworks barely earn a one out of three for Clarity and Specificity. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

# MISSOURI • U.S. HISTORY



GRADE

**F**

SCORES

Content and Rigor 1/7  
Clarity and Specificity 0/3

TOTAL SCORE

**1/10**

## Overview

Missouri’s social studies standards focus on themes and concepts to the near exclusion of substance. Content items are generally so broad as to be useless; the few historical specifics that appear are wedged together under thematic headings with scant regard to chronological coherence. Teachers and students are left with little sense of what they are expected to teach or learn.

## Goals and Organization

Missouri’s K–8 social studies standards are divided into a series of seven thematic strands: principles of constitutional democracy; principles and processes of governance systems; Missouri, United States, and world history; economic concepts and principles; elements of geographical study and analysis; relationships of individuals and groups to institutions and traditions; and tools of social science inquiry. Each strand is subdivided into broad “concepts,” for which “knowledge” items—individual content expectations commonly thought of as standards—are provided for each grade from K–8.

The high school standards are arranged identically, save that grade-level outlines are replaced with subject-specific course outlines.

Kindergarten through third grade focus on basic notions of citizenship, constitutional government, and national symbols. Fourth grade is devoted to Missouri history.

In fifth grade, U.S. history appears, covering the period through Reconstruction. Eighth grade retraces the same ground, before the high school U.S. history course covers the period from Reconstruction to the present.

## Evaluation

Missouri’s history strand provides occasional glimmers of historical content. But in essence, students are simply told, “Know history,” and no meaningful outline is provided with which they and their teachers might achieve this aim.

Historical content in early grades is exceedingly brief and vague. There are short discussions of basic political ideas and national symbols in the Constitution and governance strands. For first through third grade, just *one* content expectation (knowledge item) is outlined in the history strand for each grade and each is placed under a content heading dubbed “Knowledge of contributions of non-Missourians.” First graders are to discuss “non-Missourians typically studied in K–4 programs, e.g., George Washington [and] Abraham Lincoln”; second graders are to study “the habitats, resources, art and daily lives of Native American peoples”; and third graders are to “describe the contributions of Martin Luther King, Jr.” Fourth grade turns to Missouri history, in greater but still patchy detail.

## ✓ DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

### Social Studies Grade Level Expectations, K–8, U.S. history segments (2007)

#### Accessed from:

[http://dese.mo.gov/divimprove/curriculum/GLE/documents/ss\\_gle\\_2.o\\_k8\\_0907.pdf](http://dese.mo.gov/divimprove/curriculum/GLE/documents/ss_gle_2.o_k8_0907.pdf)

### Social Studies Grade- and Course-Level Expectations 2.0, 9–12, U.S. history segments (2007)

#### Accessed from:

[http://dese.mo.gov/divimprove/curriculum/GLE/documents/ss\\_cle\\_0907.pdf](http://dese.mo.gov/divimprove/curriculum/GLE/documents/ss_cle_0907.pdf)

American history, such as it is, begins in fifth grade, but historical content remains both brief and shallow. The history strand provides only a handful of U.S. history concepts. These direct students to understand migrations to North America, the discovery and exploration of the United States, perspectives on the American Revolution, political developments in the United States, westward expansion, and causes and consequences of the Civil War. Most concepts offer just a single, general knowledge expectation; none offers more than two.

For instance, under the migrations concept, fifth graders are to “summarize the viability and diversity of Native American cultures before Europeans came.” For the discovery and exploration concept, they are to “outline the discovery, exploration and early settlement of America.” For perspectives on the American Revolution, they are to “explain the American Revolution, including the perspectives of patriots and loyalists and factors that explain why the American colonists were successful”—a neat trick when there is no hint of required content on this subject. Westward expansion is reduced to Texas and the Mexican War, the Oregon territory, and the California gold rush, along with interactions of Native Americans, European immigrants, and “Africans brought to America.” For the Civil War, they are to “identify political, economic and social causes and consequences of the Civil War and Reconstruction.” That is the complete content for the grade.

Indeed, under Missouri’s rigidly thematic approach, the outlines for fifth and eighth grades are *virtually identical*. The fifth-grade content headings are recycled for eighth grade. Even those headings’ specific knowledge expectations are repeated nearly verbatim—save that, where fifth graders are directed to “summarize,” “outline,” and “identify,” eighth graders are instead told to “analyze,” “evaluate,” and “interpret.” The eighth-grade knowledge item on westward expansion adds the Louisiana Purchase, the Lewis and Clark expedition, and the Missouri Compromise to its brief list of specifics.

Two new content headings are added for eighth grade: political developments in the U.S. and reform movements. But each receives only a single knowledge expectation: The former tells students to “justify” the drafting of the Constitution, while the latter mentions abolitionism, the women’s movement, and—curiously—Jacksonian democracy.

The constitutional-democracy and governance strands for both grades add basic discussion of the founding documents. But that is the entire coverage of U.S. history prior to 1877 in the Missouri standards. Save for Lewis and Clark, not a single historical person is even named.

The high school U.S. history course is only marginally more specific. The concept headings are again absurdly brief and general. Indeed, they are even less specific than for grades five and eight, and they all but ignore chronology. A string of

concepts covers such cosmic topics as “political development in the United States,” economic theories, purpose of government, economic development, concepts of “place” and “location,” and so forth. A single historical reference point appears with a concept on “major twentieth-century wars”—but that is the only concept heading in high school U.S. history that refers to a specific historical period or event.

In the knowledge expectations provided for these wholly abstract headings, occasional content is tossed out almost at random, with little regard for chronology or coherence. One extraordinary item directs students to “describe and evaluate the evolution of United States domestic and foreign policies from Reconstruction to the present.” The examples include isolationism, immigration policy, Manifest Destiny, imperialism, the New Deal, the two world wars, the Cold War, and global interdependence—a breathtaking compression of post-Reconstruction policy and politics into a single inadequate list. Further items touch on “the wars of the twentieth century pertinent to U.S. history,” “the changing character of American society and culture,” the changing role of government, and the historical development of the economy, along with general principles of economics, government, and demography. Again, historical figures are totally absent. And that is the entire high school U.S. history course.

## Content and Rigor Conclusion

Missouri’s jargon-laden standards provide only the faintest bit of historical substance. The small amount of content they provide is broken into confusing charts, strands, concepts, and knowledge objectives. The “knowledge” items, where all specific content outlining is presumably supposed to appear, offer little guidance and provide only scattered and inadequate details. There is hardly any increase in rigor in later grades, as the content outlines remain fragmentary at all levels. Missouri’s meager references to actual history earn it a one out of seven for Content and Rigor. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

## Clarity and Specificity Conclusion

Missouri’s bewildering mélange of theme-based charts provides almost no specific guidance for teachers or students on what they should teach or learn. Detail is spotty at best and often absent. The standards are divided by individual grades or courses, but provide no clarity or specifics. What exists has little logical or coherent historical organization. Beyond a general sense that certain periods should be taught in certain grades, teachers and students must wait for the Show Me State to show them much of anything. Missouri’s confusing and nearly empty standards earn a zero out of three for Clarity and Specificity. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

# MONTANA • U.S. HISTORY

GRADE

**F**

SCORES

Content and Rigor 0/7  
Clarity and Specificity 0/3

TOTAL SCORE

**0/10**

## Overview

Montana’s social studies standards are rich in jargon, but devoid of substance. The document’s sole concern is theoretical and conceptual learning, leaving actual historical content entirely undefined. Students and teachers are given no guidance whatsoever on what they are actually to learn or to teach.

## Goals and Organization

Montana’s social studies standards are divided into six strands, or “content standards”:

- 1) “Students access, synthesize, and evaluate information to communicate and apply social studies knowledge to real world situations”;
- 2) “Students analyze how people create and change structures of power, authority, and governance to understand the operation of government and to demonstrate civic responsibility”;
- 3) “Students apply geographic knowledge and skills (e.g., location, place, human/environment interactions, movement, and regions)”;
- 4) “Students demonstrate an understanding of the effects of time, continuity, and change on historical and future perspectives and relationships”;
- 5) “Students make informed decisions based on an understanding of the economic principles of production, distribution, exchange, and consumption”; and
- 6) “Students demonstrate an understanding of the impact of human interaction and cultural diversity on societies.”

Within each of these six standards, the state provides benchmarks that describe what students should know and be able to do by the end of fourth and eighth grade, and upon high school graduation. Finally, the state spells out “performance standards.” These provide rubrics by which student mastery of social studies concepts at these three grade levels may be characterized as advanced, proficient, nearing proficiency, and novice.

No actual course content is outlined, nor is any specific subject matter assigned to any particular grade or block of grades.

## Evaluation

None of Montana’s elaborately-worded content standards actually specifies any *content*, let alone history. They consist of nothing more than theoretical pseudo-content, directing students to “analyze” and “apply” knowledge that is never supplied.

### DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

**Montana Standards for Social Studies,  
U.S. history segments (2000)**

**Accessed from:**

[http://opi.mt.gov/pdf/standards/  
ContStds-SocSt.pdf](http://opi.mt.gov/pdf/standards/ContStds-SocSt.pdf)

The standards are so weighed down by edu-jargon that it is difficult even to recognize the usual social studies disciplines—“economics, history, geography, government, sociology, anthropology, psychology and elements of the humanities”—which the document claims to illuminate. The first content standard (focused on “social studies knowledge”) is so nebulous that it cannot be directly linked to any of these disciplines. Several of the other content standards do at least mention economics, geography, or government. The fourth standard refers to “the effects of time, continuity, and change on historical and future perspectives and relationships.” It must, if only by a process of elimination, be the history standard.

The benchmarks for each standard are almost wholly theoretical. For instance, by the end of twelfth grade, students are to “synthesize and apply information to formulate and support reasoned personal convictions within groups and participate in negotiations to arrive at solutions to differences”—whatever that may mean. There are only occasional references to historical content, and these are offered without any explanation, context, or coherence. Under the government-centered Standard #2, for example, twelfth graders are directed to “analyze the historical and contemporary purpose of government and how the powers of government are acquired, modified, justified and used (e.g., checks and balances, Bill of Rights, [and] court decisions).”

Twenty-one broad benchmarks are provided for Standard #4, the presumptive history standard. None of them lays out specific content, however, let alone any events in American history. By the end of fourth grade, for example, students are to “identify and describe famous people, important democratic values (e.g., democracy, freedom, [and] justice), symbols (e.g., Montana and U.S. flags, [the] state flower), and holidays, in the history of Montana, American Indian tribes, and the United States.” Yet no people, famous or otherwise, ever appear in the standards.

By eighth grade, students are, among other similar examples, to “explain how and why events (e.g., American Revolution, Battle of the Little Big Horn, immigration, Women’s Suffrage [*sic*]) may be interpreted differently according to the points of view of participants, witnesses, reporters, and historians.” Yet none of these randomly chosen events is explained, interpreted, or contextualized.

By twelfth grade, students should be able to “select and analyze various documents and primary and secondary sources that have influenced the legal, political, and constitutional heritage of Montana and the United States.” And “interpret how selected cultures, historical events, periods, and patterns of change influence each other.” And “investigate, interpret, and analyze the impact of multiple historical and contemporary

viewpoints concerning events within and across cultures, major world religions, and political systems (e.g., assimilation, values, beliefs, [and] conflicts).” And so forth. All are theoretical and historically vacuous.

In the performance standards—meant to “provide a picture or profile of student achievement”—references to specific historical knowledge are again absent. Since no substantive content is ever outlined, there is no substantive performance to evaluate. The performance rubrics seek solely to categorize students’ mastery of abstract social studies skills and concepts. By fourth grade, for example, an advanced student “consistently locates and applies information of historical events and issues from a variety of sources to effectively explain connections between past and present.” The distinctions among the various performance levels are as vague as the skills themselves: A proficient student merely “locates and uses basic information of historical events to explain connections between past and present.” One nearing proficiency “locates and sometimes uses” such basic information, whereas the novice “locates, but seldom uses” it.

By eighth grade, the advanced student also “consistently conducts research to draw unique parallels between historical and current events and issues” and “critically examines and effectively compares and contrasts how culture influences and diversity contributes to human development, identity, and behavior.” Finally, by graduation, this top student “consistently analyzes historical patterns and conducts independent research to thoroughly and effectively develop and defend a position on an issue.”

*What* such issues might be is evidently not of concern to the authors of the Montana standards.

## Content and Rigor Conclusion

Apart from sporadic passing references to random historical events or documents, Montana’s jargon-packed standards contain no history at all. Students are occasionally directed to understand broad historical issues, but even these are scarcely defined; interpreting how unidentified “cultures, historical events, periods, and patterns of change influence each other” is not studying history. The overriding concern is for theoretical knowledge skills, at the expense of any substantive curriculum. Rigor is nonexistent, as the document never even suggests how students are to acquire knowledge of the cultures, events, and periods that are so glibly invoked. No indication is given that any particular material is to be covered at any particular grade level—or at all. Montana’s empty standards receive a zero out of seven for Content and Rigor. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

## Clarity and Specificity Conclusion

Montana's standards offer no guidance and lay out no sequence, save for vague skills to be achieved by fourth, eighth, and twelfth grades. There is no defined content and no detail—and thus no scope or sequence to evaluate. It is hard to imagine even the most dedicated teacher making any sense of this document; it is useless in determining or even suggesting what should be *covered* in the classroom. Montana earns a zero out of three for Clarity and Specificity. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

# NEBRASKA • U.S. HISTORY



GRADE

C

SCORES

Content and Rigor 4/7  
Clarity and Specificity 1/3

TOTAL SCORE

5/10

## Overview

Nebraska's U.S. history standards outline, in broad strokes, many key issues in American history. Unfortunately, spotty coverage and chronically inadequate detail undermine the result. The state's decision to define course sequence only in terms of broad grade blocks further undercuts the standards' usefulness.

## Goals and Organization

Nebraska's social studies standards are divided into four grade bands: K–1, 2–4, 5–8, and 9–12. For each grade band, the standards are divided into strands, which vary from grade band to grade band. Grades K–1 encompass four strands: United States history, geography, civics/government, and economics; grades 2–4 add Nebraska history to this list. Grades 5–8 are divided into four strands: United States history, world history to 1000 A.D., civics and economics, and skills. Grades 9–12 are divided into four as well: United States history, world history 1000 C.E. to the present, the governments and economies of the United States and Nebraska, and world geography.

For each strand, a numbered series of thematic or chronological headings is provided, laying out the content that students should master by the end of the given grade block. "Example indicators"—specific content standards—are then provided for each such heading.

Basic historical concepts are briefly introduced in Kindergarten and first grade, with general references to historical change, famous persons, citizenship, patriotic symbols, and holidays. Grades two through four introduce Nebraska history.

American history first appears in fifth through eighth grade, covering pre-settlement to the post-World War II period. American history is covered again in the high school block, running from pre-settlement to the present. It is not detailed in which specific grades the material will be presented, nor how many semesters (or years) are to be devoted to any given content.

## Evaluation

Nebraska's U.S. history standards have some value: They briefly sketch many key themes and issues in American history. Yet from the start they suffer from serious gaps and from a near-total lack of supporting detail.

Further, the decision to assign all material to grade blocks, rather than to specific grades, leaves it unclear when and how content is to be taught. There is an enormous difference, for instance, between fifth and eighth graders in terms of sophistication and retention—at

### ✓ DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

Nebraska Social Studies/History Standards, U.S. history segments (2003)

Accessed from:

[http://www.education.ne.gov/ss/pdf/Social\\_Studies\\_Standards.pdf](http://www.education.ne.gov/ss/pdf/Social_Studies_Standards.pdf)

what ages is the material for grades five through eight to be offered? The standards only tell us that this content is to be mastered “by the end of eighth grade.”

In Kindergarten and first grade, there is brief discussion of holidays, national symbols, and so forth. But when a broad directive asks students to “identify past events and people in legends, historical fiction, and biographies,” the only examples given are “Johnny Appleseed, Betsy Ross, etc.” It is difficult to imagine how this chronologically reversed pair could be thought to best exemplify the American past. Second through fourth grade focus solely on Nebraska history.

Broader U.S. history enters in grades five through eight. The outline is largely chronological, beginning with pre-contact Native cultures (listed with reasonable specificity), the motives and sponsors of European explorers, and then the colonies and their regional settlement. But problems quickly mount. We encounter unwelcome suggestions of political bias, as well as the tendency toward presentism—that is, judgments of the past through the lens of today’s values, standards, and norms. For example, an item on the colonial era, “perspectives of Native Americans, large landowners, farmers, artisans, women, and slaves,” seemingly invites students to pit victim groups against the large landowners.

What’s more, while some important content is mentioned, the treatment of essential historical events and issues is rushed, leading to serious omissions, lack of specifics, and inadequate explanatory detail. For example, “sources of dissatisfaction that led to the American Revolution” are mentioned, but none is specified. Students are to “explain” the Constitution and Bill of Rights, “describe major issues facing Congress and the first four presidents,” and “explain” the Hamilton-Jefferson schism—all without specifics or explanation.

Some key issues are skipped entirely. The period from the early 1790s to the Civil War is pushed under a single heading, listing little more than the Louisiana Purchase, Lewis and Clark, geographical expansion, the Monroe Doctrine, the cotton gin, and the McCormick reaper. The sole items dealing with the sectional crisis simply tell students to “describe economic and philosophical differences between the North and South” and to “identify key events leading to secession and war.” Some important Civil War individuals, the Emancipation Proclamation, and the Thirteenth through Fifteenth Amendments are mentioned. But the next heading pushes all the way to World War I, culminating with a slapdash reference to “the Spanish American War, World War I, etc.” Post-World War II America is touched upon, but the war itself is curiously missing.

The thematically organized civics strand for grades five through eight adds brief material on the Declaration of Independence and Constitution, though with no attention to chronology or context. This strand also highlights the standards’ political leanings. In a short discussion of the historical and intellectual roots of the Constitution, “the Native American heritage, e.g., Iroquois Five Nations Confederacy [and the] ‘Great Binding Law’” is prominently listed *before* “the British and American heritage,” such as “the Magna Carta, the English Bill of Rights, the Mayflower Compact, [and] the Articles of Confederation.” Such mythical claims of Iroquois roots for American constitutional thought have long been discredited. Yet the single greatest influence on the Constitution—the drafting of state constitutions after 1776—is omitted entirely.

The full span of U.S. history is covered again in high school. But the outline, though somewhat more detailed, remains brief, general, and shallow. A single heading covers the entire colonial era, with a handful of nebulous examples that include such directives as “describe the political developments” of the period. Later, students are to “relate changes in British policies that provoked the American colonists,” “discuss the debate within America concerning separation from Britain,” “explain the major domestic and foreign affairs issues facing the first presidents and Congress,” and “summarize the development of political parties”—all, again, without specifics or explanation. In the separate civics strand, we find a few additional content items on the political background of the founding era, but they, too, are brief and divorced from context.

There are occasional flashes of specificity and rigor. One reasonably specific item directs students to “compare the Declaration of Independence and ‘Common Sense.’” Madison and Washington are named in connection with the Constitutional Convention, and students are to discuss how “Supreme Court cases, e.g., *Marbury v. Madison* and *McCulloch v. Maryland*, affected the interpretation of the Constitution.” But even these directives are mostly lacking in explanation or context—and they are, in any case, the exception. More typical nineteenth-century items—passing references to “the War of 1812 and the Monroe Doctrine” or to “economic development, trade, tariffs, taxation, and trends in the national debt”—provide only a basic checklist for the era. And the crucial Jacksonian period is skipped entirely.

As the outline turns to the Civil War, students are asked to explain “the causes and effects of slavery,” along with states’ rights, tariffs, trade, western settlement, and secession. But slavery has scarcely been mentioned prior to this entry, and the abolitionist movement is never mentioned at all. Indeed, nothing is said about any specific event or person of the antebellum period—not even the Kansas-Nebraska Act, which one might expect to find in Nebraska’s standards.

Similarly broad items touch on the Civil War and Reconstruction, mentioning, for instance, “the economic and political impact of the war,” and “the roles played by the individual leaders”—none of whom is named. Students are to “relate the impact of Reconstruction on the South” without any specifics; even the Thirteenth through Fifteenth Amendments, mentioned in grades five through eight, are missing here. Labor movements and Progressivism are mentioned in general terms (“summarize political changes at the local, state, and national levels”), but Populism and Nebraska’s own William Jennings Bryan never appear. The pattern holds through the Great Depression, World War II, and beyond (even the Japanese American internment is skipped). Key points are briefly listed, but detail is skimpy and explanation virtually absent.

### **Content and Rigor Conclusion**

Nebraska does offer a basic outline of U.S. history which amounts to a checklist of important themes and issues. But the content is often hopelessly broad, with little detail or explanation. Too many items are little more than directives to “explain” an entire period without further information or explication. And, while many important themes are at least listed, serious gaps remain. Nebraska’s outline—mentioning much, but doing so far too briefly—earns a marginal four out of seven for Content and Rigor. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

### **Clarity and Specificity Conclusion**

The Nebraska standards are fairly clear and straightforward, using a simple outline format and relatively little jargon. Yet the use of age ranges rather than specific grade levels undermines the document’s usefulness. Erratic specificity and consistently inadequate detail further undermine the standards. Teachers are not clearly told what to teach when, and are given insufficiently substantive outlines on which to structure their courses. Nebraska’s structurally flawed standards earn a one out of three for Clarity and Specificity. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

# NEVADA • U.S. HISTORY



GRADE

**D**

SCORES

Content and Rigor **3/7**  
Clarity and Specificity **1/3**

TOTAL SCORE

**4/10**

## Organization

Nevada’s U.S. history standards focus obsessively on theme and theory to the near exclusion of historical content. The content standards that do appear are brief and vague. And even these are broken into thematic charts and tables, scattering related material in complete defiance of historical chronology or logic.

## Goals and Organization

Nevada’s social studies standards are divided into four strands: history, geography, economics, and civics. Each strand is further divided into thematic subsections, called “standards,” which are in turn divided into “themes.” For each theme, benchmarks are provided for individual grades from K–5, and for grade blocks 6–8 and 9–12.

The history strand is divided into four standards: people, civilizations and cultures; nation building and development; social responsibility and change; and international relationships and power. Each standard is divided into “United States & Nevada” and “world” themes, and grade-level or grade-block benchmarks are provided for each theme. For grade blocks 6–8 and 9–12, the benchmarks within each theme are arranged under chronological headings (such as “Colonial America,” “Antebellum America,” etc.).

A separate “integrated” standards document is supplied for grade block 6–8. It adds no content, but rather reorganizes the existing benchmarks chronologically. In other words, benchmarks from the four thematic history standards are grouped together into a single chronological outline, with related geography, economics, and civics benchmarks listed in parallel columns.

Basic concepts of community and customs are introduced from Kindergarten through third grade, though little history is included. Fourth grade introduces Nevada history.

With the exception of grades six through eight, where the state provides the “integrated” standards document described above, the scattering of chronologically related content across separate standards makes it difficult to discern the specific U.S. history sequence in the various grades and grade blocks. However, an introductory “Scope & Sequence” summary indicates that fifth grade is meant to introduce American history from pre-colonization to westward expansion. Grades six through eight—focused on “interdependence & perspectives”—are, after a “short review” of the colonial period, to move from the Revolution to World War II. The high school grade block—focused on “continuity & change”—is, after a brief review of the Civil War and Reconstruction, to cover 1900 to the present. Middle and high school courses are also to stress connections between history and “contemporary” issues.

### ✓ DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

#### Nevada Social Studies Standards, U.S. history segments (2008)

**Accessed from:**

<http://nde.doe.nv.gov/Standards/SocialStudies/CompleteStandardsDec2008.pdf>

#### Nevada Integrated Middle School Social Studies Standards, U.S. history segments (2010)

**Accessed from:**

<http://nde.doe.nv.gov/Standards/SocialStudies/IntegratedStds7-8.FINAL.pdf>

## Evaluation

Nevada’s relentlessly theory-based standards seem determined to dismember all content in the name of social studies “concepts.” Benchmarks related to the same era are arbitrarily divided among the various thematic standards, defying the most basic chronological exposition. Content standards are brief and vague. Even in the “integrated” standards for sixth through eighth grade, which organize the benchmarks chronologically, the lack of depth and detail undermine the document’s value.

We are told that these shallow and chaotically organized standards have been designed to allow teachers “greater flexibility” in tailoring classes to the particular “needs” of their students, and in designing lessons that “capitalize” on teachers’ own particular “area(s) of expertise.” Yet surely standards should outline solid and common core content for *all* classrooms—not merely defer to the tastes of individual students, or to teachers’ particular areas of knowledge.

The materials for Kindergarten through third grade are all but devoid of history. A search of all four history “standards” turns up little more than vague references to chronology, holidays, and sources.

Starting with the U.S. history introduction in fifth grade, some substance appears. Most benchmarks, notwithstanding, are egregiously lacking in detail and specifics; far too often, students are simply told to “understand” a given period. In the “people” standard, short and general benchmarks tell students to discuss Native American cultures, European contact, and the regional diversity of early settlement. Under “nation building,” they are told to consider European exploration and rivalries, the introduction of slavery, cultural conflict, “the events that led to the Declaration of Independence,” and “the causes, key events, and people of the American Revolution”—all without any required content. Under “social responsibility & change,” they are to consider aspects of daily life, while under “international relationships & power” they are to discuss U.S. foreign relations. And some highly relevant material—such as the colonies’ relations with Britain—is shunted into the world history section.

This confused fragmentation continues in sixth through eighth grades. Here, under the “people” theme, students are to study European contact, colonial lifestyles (“as determined by race, class, and gender”), antebellum industrialization and arts, westward expansion, and, abruptly, the social and cultural effects of the two world wars. Under “nation building,” they are to cover Nevada statehood, political events of the founding era, and contributors to a national identity, including Pontiac, George Washington, and Abigail Adams. A directive follows to “identify and describe the causes, key people, and events of the

Civil War,” and on through the Gilded Age and Progressivism (mentioning only industrialization) to the Great Depression.

The “social responsibility” theme then jumps back to the American Revolution (students are to understand its “political and economic causes and effects”), antebellum America (touching on the reform movements and abolitionism), Reconstruction (the Thirteenth through Fifteenth Amendments and Jim Crow), the Gilded Age and Progressivism again (mentioning the Populist and Progressive movements), and the 1920s. The “international relationships” segment has units for Colonial America, including the impact of the French and Indian War and the two world wars—*followed* by the Gilded Age and Progressivism.

This organizational chaos continues unabated through high school, though the benchmarks themselves show marginal improvements in specificity. For example, students are asked to “describe the rise of corporations and analyze working conditions in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.” But such items are the exception; most remain alarmingly short on specifics or explanation, with content again scattered among the standards, jumping from era to era as thematic topics dictate.

Nevada seems to recognize the confusion all of this is apt to cause; hence the creation of the far simpler “integrated standards” for grades six through eight, which place all related benchmarks together in chronological sequence. Unfortunately, since the content is integrated only for these grades, and since they merely reorganize the existing benchmarks, the benchmarks *themselves* must be greatly improved before the integrated standards would add real value. Jefferson, Madison, Hamilton, Lincoln, and Franklin Roosevelt do not appear in Nevada’s standards, integrated or otherwise. Nor do the Marshall Court, the Missouri Compromise, or McCarthyism. That list could go on and on.

## Content and Rigor Conclusion

Save in the single integrated standards document, Nevada’s baffling organization splits content beyond any bounds of logic or coherence. And even if the standards were rationally organized, the benchmarks themselves would still be marginally adequate at best. Substantive gaps and overly broad directives plague the entire document. While rigor improves slightly at the high school level, it remains woefully inadequate. Nevada declares, in any case, that teachers need not be bound by these standards. Only the most basic facts are apparently *required*; teachers are instead to shape courses as best meets “the needs of their students,” and as best fits their “area(s) of expertise.” Teachers will indeed need expertise to create sensible courses from this mish-mash and one fears that

students' true needs—such as common historical literacy—will not be met. Nevada's partial and fragmentary content earns a three out of seven for Content and Rigor. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

## Clarity and Specificity Conclusion

Nevada's standards document is confusing to the point of uselessness. A visual nightmare of charts and tables makes it all but impossible to follow. Detail is sorely lacking, and the benchmarks fail to provide specifics. Individual grade-level expectations are provided only for Kindergarten through fifth grade; beyond that, they describe only grade blocks (6–8 and 9–12). Insofar as the sequence can be divined, it adheres to the flawed division of U.S. history into a single course across elementary, middle, and high schools. Save for brief reviews, earlier material is relegated to earlier grades, despite students' inevitably less developed sophistication. The "integrated" standards are far clearer—but are provided at present *only* for grade block 6–8. And, since the "benchmarks" they provide are identical, detail and specificity do not improve. Consequently, Nevada can earn no better than a one out of three for Clarity and Specificity. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

# NEW HAMPSHIRE • U.S. HISTORY



GRADE

**F**

SCORES

Content and Rigor 0/7  
Clarity and Specificity 0/3

TOTAL SCORE

**0/10**

## Overview

New Hampshire’s social studies standards offer no coherent outline of U.S. history content. General themes and concepts are openly preferred over historical specifics, which are denigrated as “lengthy and fragmented list[s].” The few historical “examples”—all purely optional—defy historical sense, grouping entirely disparate issues and periods in the name of overarching themes.

## Goals and Organization

New Hampshire’s social studies standards are divided into five “content strands”: civics, economics, geography, U.S./New Hampshire history, and world history. Each strand is divided into further sub-themes, or “curriculum standards.” Charts link each such standard to “suggested expectations” for grade blocks K–2, 3–4, 5–6, 7–8, and 9–12. Ten “themes” are also provided to further categorize the content (conflict and cooperation; civic ideals, practices, and engagement; people, places and environment; and so on). Finally, additional charts link these themes to concepts raised in the five content strands, and relevant themes are also noted after each expectation.

The history strands are organized thematically, not chronologically. Both U.S. and world history are divided, in every grade block, into five identical standards: 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.

The U.S./New Hampshire history strand appears in each grade block, but no specific historical scope or time span is assigned to any grade or grade block.

## Evaluation

New Hampshire’s purely thematic arrangement of content seems designed to defy historical coherence. Teachers are encouraged to use the ten broad themes “as a way of finding meaningful ways of addressing the standards and expectations and, perhaps more importantly, as a way of using the frameworks to encourage higher-order thinking in our students.” But students are, apparently, to engage in such “higher-order thinking” unburdened by anything as mundane as historical content. The expectations listed for each historical sub-theme provide no specific information on any particular events, persons, or periods. They instead lay out broad thematic issues to be considered—ways in which students might explore whatever historical specifics their teachers may happen to present. Most expectations end with a smattering of historical examples, but these only make matters worse, jamming together disparate items from different eras without explanation

### ✓ DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

**K–12 Social Studies New Hampshire Curriculum Framework, U.S. history segments (2006)**

**Accessed from:**

[http://www.education.nh.gov/instruction/curriculum/social\\_studies/documents/frameworks.pdf](http://www.education.nh.gov/instruction/curriculum/social_studies/documents/frameworks.pdf)

or context. There is no hint of a chronological outline. Worse, the state makes it clear that even these confusing and content-thin expectations “are not meant to be requirements to be taught,” and are merely “offered as concrete illustrations among many other possibilities.”

No sequence is ever defined: The few examples in the expectations refer to disparate eras in all grades. After conventional consideration of national symbols, holidays, and local history in the early grades, unusable fragments of actual history begin to appear in fifth and sixth grades. While little content is specified, the standards still manage to cite the mythical and discredited claim of Iroquois influence on the U.S. Constitution: Students may “explain how and why people have developed forms of self-government,” the examples given being “the Mayflower Compact or the Iroquois League”; or they might “explain how the foundations of American democracy are rooted in European, Native American and colonial traditions, experiences and institutions.” Vague references to the arts, economic development, and western expansion are also tossed in, all without any explanation or specifics.

In seventh and eighth grades, students continue to focus on broad issues to the exclusion of specific history. A few more examples appear, but these remain trans-historical and decontextualized to the point of inanity. An expectation asking students to “analyze the tension between states’ rights and national authority” gives, as examples, the nullification crisis of 1832 and school integration in the 1960s. Another, discussing “major United States efforts to remove European influence from the Western Hemisphere,” pairs the Monroe Doctrine and the Cuban missile crisis. A directive to “compare and contrast the rationales for entering into war with other nations” mentions just “the American Revolution or the Korean Conflict.” Other items link the XYZ affair with the Vietnam War, the Louisiana Purchase with the Marshall Plan, and the triangular trade with modern multinational corporations. The expectation coming closest to a historically sensible query asks students to “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.”

This ahistorical, if not anti-historical, pattern is identical in the high school grade block. Here, students are to analyze political parties, such as the Whigs or the Progressives; or compare the separation of church and state in early New Hampshire with the Moral Majority; or examine federalism through the Articles of Confederation and the New Deal, sectionalism through the Hartford Convention and the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, or America’s global influence through “the Bill of Rights or popular music.” Mercantilism is paired with NAFTA; Anne Hutchinson with “the silent majority”; abolitionism with the abortion debate.

It is ironic that the curriculum framework dismisses chronological and factual history as “fragmented,” when its own hyper-thematic arrangement utterly fragments any historical logic or coherence. Of course, it is made clear that teachers are under no obligation to introduce even the few, random, hopelessly decontextualized events or issues that happen to be mentioned—they (and the thematic expectations themselves) are merely suggestions.

## Content and Rigor Conclusion

New Hampshire’s standards are absent of both content and rigor. No substantive content is ever outlined—students are merely to analyze themes, using whatever content their teachers choose to introduce. Since only vague (and optional) thematic issues are covered, there can be no increase in substance from grade to grade. The only sop to increasing grade-level rigor is that *more* thematic expectations are introduced in each successive grade block. Throughout, however, personal relevance—the habitual social studies approach to history—is stressed as the key aim. New Hampshire’s essentially content-less standards earn a zero out of seven for Content and Rigor. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

## Clarity and Specificity Conclusion

New Hampshire’s standards make fairly clear what is expected; unfortunately, almost nothing is. It is easy enough to find the “expectations” for each grade block. But since no specific material is assigned to any specific level, there is no sequence. Course scope is all but nonexistent; the only detail is in the haphazard historical examples—and even these are optional. New Hampshire’s empty expectations cannot possibly guide teachers in structuring a course. They might well be better off—or at least less confused—with no “framework” at all. Offering no structure beyond vapid themes and generalizations, New Hampshire’s standards merit a zero out of three for Clarity and Specificity. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

# NEW JERSEY • U.S. HISTORY



## GRADE

C

## SCORES

Content and Rigor 4/7  
Clarity and Specificity 1/3

## TOTAL SCORE

5/10

## Overview

New Jersey’s standards mention many important issues in American history, especially at the high school level, but they do this with few specifics and many substantive gaps. Content is also relentlessly split between thematic standards and strands, robbing the material of chronological coherence. A tendentious focus on presentism—that is, judgment of the past in terms of modern values—further undermines historical comprehension and context.

## Goals and Organization

New Jersey’s social studies expectations are divided into three standards: 1) U.S. history: America in the world; 2) World history/global studies; and 3) Active citizenship in the twenty-first century. The U.S. history standard is subdivided by grade block, laying out what students are to achieve by the end of pre-Kindergarten and fourth, eighth, and twelfth grades. (The world history standard includes sections for the end of grades eight and twelve, and the citizenship standard includes sections for the end of grades four, eight, and twelve.)

For the pre-K and K–4 grade blocks, the U.S. history standard is divided among four strands: civics, government, and human rights; geography, people, and the environment; economics, innovation, and technology; and history, culture, and perspectives. For each strand, the state provides “content statements” that lay out the broad themes that are to be covered. Finally, “cumulative progress indicators” provide content expectations for each statement.

The U.S. history standard for grade block 5–8 is organized similarly, except that it is first divided into broad chronological eras, then into content statements and cumulative progress indicators. Grade block 9–12 follows the same arrangement, save that some eras contain multiple content statements that even further subdivide the era by theme.

Concepts of democratic government, selected founding documents, symbols, holidays, and basics elements of New Jersey history are all introduced from pre-Kindergarten through fourth grade.

Grades five through eight introduce U.S. history from pre-settlement to Reconstruction. The high school materials begin again with early European settlement and continue to the present.

## ✓ DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

**New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards for Social Studies, U.S. history segments (2009)**

### Accessed from:

[http://www.state.nj.us/education/cccs/2009/std6\\_ss.doc](http://www.state.nj.us/education/cccs/2009/std6_ss.doc)

## Evaluation

From the start, New Jersey stresses present-day relevance and personal connections as the principal goal of social studies. New technologies and digital resources are emphasized over more traditional research and teaching skills, allowing “21st-century learners to transcend the limits of time and place and experience historic events virtually.” Unfortunately, coherent presentation of historical content is given far less priority. American history specifically—framed from the outset in terms of “America in the world”—is meant to give students “knowledge and skills to think analytically about how past and present interactions of people, cultures, and the environment shape the American heritage.” But students are apparently meant to achieve these lofty aims with a deeply flawed and often marginally coherent historical overview.

Pre-Kindergarten through fourth grade offers conventional basic content organized solely by theme. Multicultural perspectives are heavily emphasized, encouraging presentism—judging the past in terms of the present—over context and comprehension.

In fifth through eighth grade, the history standard is divided into overarching “eras,” starting with the conventional (but historically misleading) “three worlds meet” model—meant to place equal emphasis on European, Native American, and African cultures and contacts up to 1620—before moving into the colonial period and beyond. The division of each era’s content into thematic strands undercuts chronological sequence and historical connections, while the broad cumulative progress indicators fail to provide explanatory structure or detail.

In the section on colonization and settlement, for example, general reference is made to religious freedom and participatory government, the impact of “race, gender and status,” imperial rivalry over resources, and slavery and indentured servitude. But no specifics whatsoever are supplied: Virtually no persons, dates, or actual events are mentioned for the entire colonial period. More specifics appear in the Revolutionary and early National periods; but, for example, the Alien and Sedition Acts, which are placed in the civics strand, are mentioned well *before* the Seven Years War, which is pushed into the catch-all “history, culture and perspectives” strand. Isolated historical issues appear in the period before the Civil War and Reconstruction, including Manifest Destiny, Jacksonian democracy, and the National Bank. But these references are shorn of all context or logic. Worse, much crucial content is absent: James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, the Marshall Court, and John Brown are all excluded. Directives to “prioritize the causes and events

that led to the Civil War from different perspectives” do not substitute for a factual historical summary.

High school U.S. history jumps back to early European settlement and then runs to the present. The cumulative progress indicators become more numerous and reference more historical specifics. By focusing on narrower issues and time spans, they come closer to providing an actual outline and include a fair amount of important content, at least in passing. But the continued division of content into strands seriously damages coherence and chronological structure, and substantial gaps remain. Judicial review is mentioned, lumped together with issues of the 1780s and 1790s, but the Marshall Court is still absent. The election of 1800 is missing. The Missouri Compromise, nullification, the Mexican War, the Compromise of 1850, and the *Dred Scot* decision appear, but they are isolated and out of context, mentioned amidst sweeping thematic headings on society, economics, and government. A cumulative progress indicator on the pursuit of equality thrusts together “the Declaration of Independence, the Seneca Falls Declaration of Sentiments and Resolution, the Emancipation Proclamation, and the Gettysburg Address.”

The modern era is somewhat tighter. Content statements covering narrower periods and issues, such as Progressive reforms or World War I, provide a measure of focus. But specifics continue to be erratic and patchy, and organization often remains illogical. The atomic-bomb decision is discussed, for example, yet Pearl Harbor and the Nazis never appear. Chronology is routinely bent in order to fit events or issues into the thematic strands, and the cumulative progress indicators are often nebulous. It is not enough to direct students to “analyze the impact of the Great Depression on the American family, migratory groups, and ethnic and racial minorities,” or to “analyze the roles of various alliances among nations and their leaders in the conduct and outcomes of the [*sic*] World War II,” without providing further information. Teachers will have to supply their own substantive outlines if their students are to have sufficient content knowledge to “analyze” and “explore.”

Even as historical structure, chronology, and factual coherence are often evaded, heavy emphasis is placed on issues of race, class, and gender, all helping students to relate “content knowledge to current issues.” Students in fifth through eighth grades are, for example, to “examine the ideals found in the Declaration of Independence, and assess the extent to which they were fulfilled for women, African Americans, and Native Americans during this time period.” Likewise, high school students are to “judge the fairness of government treaties, policies, and actions that resulted in Native American migration and removal,” and to “determine if American policies regarding Japanese internment and actions against

other minority groups were a denial of civil rights.” Such questions reek of politics and presentism and ignore historical context and comprehension.

## Content and Rigor Conclusion

New Jersey’s standards are not devoid of content; the cumulative progress indicators mention many important issues and some important specific events. Unfortunately, these examples are arbitrarily split among overarching thematic strands and are frequently grouped by theme even within those strands. Even in the somewhat more detailed high school guidelines, many crucial people and events are absent. Educators are given little guidance with which to *teach* the content students are asked to analyze and evaluate. The entire document, furthermore, is politically loaded and tendentious: Students are not asked to develop historical comprehension, but to judge the past by today’s standards in order to make it relevant to modern and personal concerns. New Jersey’s content, fragmented and patchy, can only earn a four out of seven for Content and Rigor. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

## Clarity and Specificity Conclusion

New Jersey’s array of content charts—laden with standards, strands, content statements, and cumulative progress indicators—result in a confusing document. The failure to distinguish between individual grade levels further undercuts the usefulness of these disjointed guidelines: Is content for grade block 5–8, for instance, aimed at fifth graders or at more sophisticated eighth graders? Further, the thematic and erratically specific cumulative progress indicators provide only partial detail, leaving course scope poorly defined, especially prior to high school. The document makes clear what *attitudes* students are meant to acquire about U.S. history—but it puts too little emphasis on what they are expected to *know*. The confused and confusing document earns a one out of three for Clarity and Specificity. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

# NEW MEXICO • U.S. HISTORY

GRADE

**D**

SCORES

Content and Rigor 2/7  
Clarity and Specificity 1/3

TOTAL SCORE

**3/10**



## Overview

New Mexico provides a rudimentary historical outline for teachers and students. Sadly, the content is absurdly brief, barely managing to list important events. Worse still, the standards are too often politicized, inaccurate, or both.

## Goals and Organization

New Mexico's social studies standards are divided into four strands: history, geography, civics and government, and economics. Each strand is subdivided into "benchmarks" (i.e., content areas); under each benchmark, "performance standards"—specific grade- or course-level expectations—are listed for individual grades from K–8 and for grades 9–12 as a block.

The history strand is divided into four benchmarks: New Mexico, United States, world, and skills. History performance standards under these benchmarks follow a largely chronological structure, with some thematic departures.

Kindergarten through fourth grade introduce national holidays and symbols, famous individuals, and concepts of chronology and sources.

The U.S. history sequence is presented as a single course, divided among grades five, eight, and high school. Fifth grade covers pre-settlement through the colonial era; eighth grade runs from the Revolution to Reconstruction; high school outlines Reconstruction to the present.

## Evaluation

New Mexico's U.S. history outline is exceedingly brief and rudimentary. The state actually gives more space to its *physical education* standards than it does to history. In fact, the high school performance standards fill just one-and-a-half pages, the eighth grade standards a single page, and the fifth grade standards barely one-third of a page.

There are also errors of fact and emphasis and, while material is presented largely chronologically, ahistorical thematic groupings repeatedly intrude. The arbitrary division of content into strands and benchmarks confuses things even more. For example, some U.S. history material, which relates to world or New Mexico issues, turns up under those benchmarks, and not under U.S. history. Conversely, some fragments of world and New Mexico history turn up under the U.S. benchmark.

Furthermore, as in many other states, U.S. history is split into a single course over grades five, eight, and high school. Students in early grades lack sophistication, which means that

### DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

**New Mexico Content Standards with Benchmarks and Performance Standards: Social Studies, K–12, U.S. history segments (2009)**

**Accessed from:**

<http://www.ped.state.nm.us/standards/>

only the time periods covered in later grades can be treated or comprehended in appropriate depth. As such, modern history is given *de facto* prioritization, since it is all that high school students will study.

From Kindergarten through fourth grade, students are introduced to the basics: holidays, symbols, and famous people. Concepts of chronology and sources appear under the history strand’s “skills” benchmark. Patchy coverage and tendentious emphasis are evident from the start: The selective list of important individuals includes “George Washington, Ben Franklin, César Chávez, Rosa Parks, National Association for Advancement of Colored People [NAACP], tribal leaders, [and the] American Indian Movement [AIM]”—a historically unbalanced overemphasis on minorities and minority groups.

Similar problems continue in fifth grade, where detail is again in short supply. The outline opens with exploration and colonization, listing a few specific names and motivations, before touching on interactions between Europeans and Native Americans, the introduction of slavery, and representative government/democratic practices. Regrettably, even this brief overview makes room for the false and long-discredited notion that the Iroquois League was a key influence on early American government: The examples given for early representative government are “Iroquois nation model, town meetings, [and] assemblies.”

The outline for eighth grade is somewhat more substantive, but it remains unacceptably brief, and errors persist. Students are to discuss “the economic and political reasons for the American Revolution,” yet the only example given is “attempts to regulate colonial trade through passage of Tea Act, Stamp Act and Intolerable Acts.” Even this example lacks specifics, and the acts are cited out of chronological order. Most importantly, though, the statement itself is wrong: The issue was taxation without consent, not trade regulation (which the colonies accepted until the eve of independence). Brevity and inaccuracy continue. After passing references to the Declaration of Independence and Articles of Confederation, major debates of the Constitutional Convention are mentioned, but the only example given is “the federalist papers [*sic*]” which were written *after* the convention to promote ratification.

Washington’s establishment of the cabinet and two-term presidency, Hamilton’s financial plan, and the party schism are listed. But the standards then skip to the Jacksonian era, ignoring the election of 1800, the Louisiana Purchase, and the War of 1812. They touch on white male suffrage, Native American removal, abolitionism (limited to Quakers, Harriet Tubman, and the Underground Railroad), westward expansion, and the early women’s movement. The Missouri and 1850 compromises are lumped together; extension of slavery to the

territories includes “Dred Scott [*sic*] decision [and] Kansas-Nebraska Act”—again out of order. A few key leaders, one battle (Gettysburg) and some social consequences of the Civil War are mentioned; Reconstruction plans are cited but not explained, along with the Thirteenth through Fifteenth Amendments and the rise of segregation. A few historical details appear, out of context, under the civics strand—and here, for a *second* time, students are asked to hail the mythical “contributions of Native Americans in providing a model that was utilized in forming the United States government (Iroquois League).”

The high school course resumes with Reconstruction and its effect, but no examples are given. What follows is more rushed and fragmentary than ever. A single list briefly raises technological change, consumerism, and the rise of “business leaders” (Rockefeller and Carnegie are the sole examples). Monopolies, urbanization, immigration, and organized labor are mentioned. Reform movements are limited to “Populists, William Jennings Bryan, Jane Addams, muckrakers” and conservation, along with “progressive reforms,” “e.g., the national income tax, direct election of senators, women’s suffrage, [and] prohibition”—a chronological swath covering the 1860s to the 1920s. America’s “expanding role in the world during the late 19th and 20th centuries” runs from the Spanish American War through Theodore Roosevelt to World War I, with only a few scattered details. The 1920s, the Great Depression, and World War II are barely touched on. A grossly non-chronological unit on civil rights lumps together the Reconstruction amendments, *Plessy v. Ferguson*, *Brown v. Board of Education*, and *Roe v. Wade*. Post-war and Cold War issues are listed in largely thematic clusters, followed by extremely general coverage of more recent events.

The civics strand again provides some additional historical material, but that material is *not* chronologically aligned with the time span covered in the high school history course. And, in a now familiar pattern, students are to discuss for a *third* time “the philosophical foundations of the American political system in terms of the inalienable rights of people and the purpose of government, to include: Iroquois League and its organizational structure for effective governance”—which is *followed* by Locke, Blackstone, and other English precedents.

## Content and Rigor Conclusion

New Mexico’s standards provide a very basic factual outline of American history, providing some structure for teachers and making some effort to delineate what students are expected to know. The outline, however, is far too brief and chronologically muddled, and it contains several outright errors. Minority groups are given disproportionate attention—the insistence

on the Iroquois's alleged influence on American government is repeated throughout—while too much essential history is omitted. The unfortunate decision to split the U.S. history curriculum across grades five, eight, and high school, furthermore, means that early America is studied only by younger children with limited comprehension—a fact the standards tacitly acknowledge by specifying far fewer performance standards in fifth and eighth grades than in high school. But the modest increase in grade-level content is not especially helpful if the earlier periods are essentially written off. New Mexico's brief and flawed standards receive a two out of seven for Content and Rigor. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

### Clarity and Specificity Conclusion

New Mexico provides a relatively straightforward list of required content for each grade or course level, but it requires far too little, especially in earlier grades (which cover material that is never recapitulated). The division of content into strands and benchmarks is both unnecessary and confusing. Aside from these arbitrary organizational categories, the standards are largely free from jargon—but there is no introductory or explanatory text whatsoever. Detail is often sparse or absent; too often, what is presented is biased or erroneous. New Mexico seems to recognize that substantive content outlines are necessary for teachers and students—but they could have provided a great deal more. The skimpy and sometimes poorly arranged standards earn a one out of three for Clarity and Specificity. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

# NEW YORK • U.S. HISTORY



GRADE

**A-**

SCORES

Content and Rigor **6/7**  
Clarity and Specificity **3/3**

TOTAL SCORE

**9/10**

## Overview

New York's U.S. history standards are among the most substantively comprehensive and sophisticated in the country. Despite occasional departures from chronology and gaps or shortcomings in content, the overall package could serve as a model for many other states.

## Goals and Organization

New York's social studies curriculum consists of five standards: history of the United States and New York; world history; geography; economics; and civics, citizenship, and government. All five are integrated chronologically in each grade- or course-level history outline.

For grades Kindergarten through sixth grade, the core curriculum provides "content understandings" which constitute grade-level content expectations organized under chronological or thematic headings. These content expectations are linked in a parallel column to conceptual "concepts/themes" (change, culture, government, etc.).

For seventh and eighth grades, subject-specific course outlines are provided. The history course outlines are divided into chronological/thematic "units" and subheadings, for which straightforward and substantive content outlines are provided. Parallel columns link the outline's content to the five standards, to conceptual concepts/themes, and to suggested classroom exercises. High school organization is largely identical, save that the suggested classroom exercises are replaced by detailed historical study questions and suggested documents.

Basic concepts of chronology, citizenship, symbols, and holidays are introduced from Kindergarten through third grade. Fourth grade introduces New York history up to the mid-nineteenth century. Fifth grade introduces "the United States, Canada and Latin America," mainly focusing on economics, governments, and similarly broad themes.

The main U.S. history sequence begins in seventh and eighth grades with a full course called "United States and New York State History," running from pre-settlement to the present; teachers are "encouraged" to devote two full years to the material. At the high school level, a "United States History and Government" course (apparently a single year, though it is not specifically stated) recapitulates the period through the Constitution, then continues to the present, with particular emphasis on issues of politics and government.

## Evaluation

At times, New York's standards are almost overflowing with content. Few states make such an effort to incorporate so much substantive and explanatory detail in their outlines.

### ✓ DOCUMENTS REVIEWED<sup>1</sup>

**New York Social Studies Resource Guide with Core Curriculum, U.S. history segments (1999)**

**Accessed from:**

<http://www.p12.nysed.gov/ciai/socst/ssrg.html>

<sup>1</sup> The New York social studies standards have not changed since our last evaluation, *Effective State Standards for U.S. History: A 2003 Report Card*. The state received the same score (roughly 90%) in each review. However, for this review, we changed our grading scale. In the 2003 review, a 90/100 yielded an A. In this review, a 9/10 yields an A-. For complete discussion of our 2011 grading metric, see Appendix A. For complete discussion of the 2003 grading metric, see: <http://www.edexcellence.net/publications-issues/publications/effectivestatehistory.html>.

There are some flaws, beginning with odd gaps in content and thematic headings that occasionally break up chronological coherence. Also, the solid content is hemmed in with theory-laden introductory material, packed with confusing conceptual charts and tables.

A clear tension is evident between the traditional emphasis on *e pluribus unum*—out of many, one—and a more modern, multicultural focus. For example, while the standards reject “long lists of ethnic groups, heroes, and contributions” and stress that “all members of a given group will not necessarily share the same view,” teachers are also admonished that “tolerance for practices such as the Nazi Holocaust, totalitarianism, chattel slavery, the subjugation of peoples, and the infringement of human rights are not acceptable.” Unfortunately, while conceding that such questions “must be studied in historical context,” the standards also insist they must be “evaluated within a values perspective.” But equating more distant historical conflicts and inequities with recent atrocities such as the Holocaust places teachers on shaky ground. Students should be urged to *comprehend* the values of earlier times even if they have now been rejected, rather than condemn the past through a modern-day moral lens.

Still, strengths greatly outweigh weaknesses. New York has made a clear commitment to serious history education.

Early grades are conventional, focusing on basic ideas of chronology, government, and the American past. Yet the fourth-grade overview of New York history, though sometimes lacking in detail, is still remarkably comprehensive for the grade level.

The fifty-plus-page outline for seventh and eighth grades begins with pre-contact cultures (special attention being paid to native inhabitants of the New York region), European exploration, and regional settlement patterns. The level of detail is impressively well-focused and clear. Coverage of the Revolutionary crisis touches on mercantilism, Enlightenment thought, the impact of the French and Indian War, even the rise of a new American identity. The *reasons* for Britain’s policy shift are outlined. The suggested classroom exercises raise valuable analytical questions and recommend document readings.

Exemplary sections handle vital but oft-neglected issues, such as early attempts to govern after independence, clashes between the Continental Congress and the states, and the rise of sectional tensions over slavery. A remarkable unit on “Experiments in Government” offers details on the structure and weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation, material hardly touched by most state standards. New York’s 1777 constitution is covered in depth, as is the federal Constitution, including the Annapolis Convention and crucial issues at the 1787 Convention.

Despite these strengths, some items are overly broad. An item on colonial settlement patterns simply directs students to consider “who? when? why?” without mentioning specific regions or groups; British acts before the American Revolution are reduced to “Stamp Act and others.” Some issues are skirted: Iroquois accomplishments are detailed, but heavy Iroquois reliance on warfare is not. And there are some chronological oddities; for example, New York’s 1734 Zenger trial appears *after* the Stamp Act. Nonetheless, the overall level of sophistication is impressively high, clearly defining key historical issues and events.

The sections that follow, unfortunately, follow a more thematic organization: “New Government in Operation” jumbles material from the 1790s to 1824, often with thin detail, before moving to the Age of Jackson (which receives better detail), then *back* to the 1790s in a catch-all unit on the “Pre-Industrial Age: 1790–1860s.” The background to the Civil War largely restores chronological structure—even though John Brown and the Fugitive Slave Act, placed under “the emotional impact of slavery,” appear *before* the Compromise of 1850, the Kansas-Nebraska Act, and the *Dred Scott* decision. The analysis of the Civil War and its consequences is, however, impressive.

Late nineteenth-century economic and social issues are also treated well, though politics are neglected save for a passing reference to the Populists. But politics enter more fully by 1900. Unusually, Wilson’s crackdowns on dissidents are discussed in some detail. Other frequently neglected points appear: the 1920s disarmament movement; the mechanism of the 1929 crash; the Great Depression’s role in the rise of totalitarianism; the Munich agreement; and the Nuremberg trials. A thematic approach reappears in brief units on post-war America, with the Cold War and fall of Communism outlined *before* post-war domestic issues are addressed. Most strangely, McCarthyism is not mentioned at all.

The high school course—focused on issues of government—begins with a solid recap of key issues from Colonial America through the Constitution. There is more in this relatively brief recapitulation than in the full standards of many states. The “suggested study questions” column also adds considerable depth, raising penetrating and sophisticated issues: For instance, it asks students to analyze which elements from the state constitutions were incorporated into the federal Constitution, as well as why national powers were deliberately weak under the Articles.

Theme, nonetheless, sometimes trumps chronology. The development of constitutional interpretation, for example, runs from the 1790s to the 1820s, before politics *in* the 1790s are discussed. But the level of detail nonetheless remains high (for instance, the Know-Nothings, left out in seventh and eighth

grades, now appear). This combination—admirable detail despite some overly-thematic organization—continues with units on Gilded Age business, labor, and social consequences. But chronology reasserts itself again, and mostly holds, with Progressivism, imperialism, World War I, and so forth. The details of the New Deal are presented particularly well, as is the coming of World War II (though the war itself is largely reduced to home front impact). The emergence of the Cold War and American post-war social change, in contrast to seventh and eighth grades, are handled chronologically and in admirable depth (this time including McCarthyism). Despite some continued thematic groupings, the outline closes on a high note, providing a level of content on recent decades that is rarely matched by other states.

### Content and Rigor Conclusion

New York's core-curriculum content outline is not perfect; occasional gaps and deviations from chronology stand out at times, but it is impressive on the whole. The material presented is frequently extraordinary in its substantive thoroughness, not only listing important points but *explaining* key issues. The tension between historical and modern perspectives, though occasionally irksome, is not seriously intrusive. Rigor is remarkable in seventh and eighth grades, though not beyond what students can reasonably handle, especially over two years. A high level of detail is maintained in high school: While the colonial/Revolutionary eras are principally assigned to seventh and eighth grades, the high school recapitulation is itself impressive. If a few substantive gaps were plugged and the outline made fewer thematic departures from chronology, there would be little to criticize. At its stronger moments, New York offers one of the best curriculum guides in the country. The standards earn a six out of seven for Content and Rigor. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

### Clarity and Specificity Conclusion

New York's core curriculum is clear, specific, and highly detailed, laying out the required content for each grade or course in straightforward outline format. References to the five standards are unobtrusively integrated, while the suggested classroom exercise questions frequently add significantly to content and interpretation. The sequence is clear and sensible, introducing the Americas generally in fifth grade, devoting all of seventh and eighth grades to U.S. history, and returning to it with solid review and new material in high school. Students and teachers are clearly shown what they are expected to cover and to learn—indeed, if all Americans knew what these standards expect New York students to know, the crisis in U.S. history education would be largely resolved. The detailed and clear curriculum guide earns three out of three for Clarity and Specificity. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

# NORTH CAROLINA • U.S. HISTORY



GRADE

**F**

SCORES

Content and Rigor 1/7  
Clarity and Specificity 1/3

TOTAL SCORE

**2/10**

## Overview

North Carolina’s social studies standards openly abjure detailed substantive content: Teachers are to be given “flexibility,” and students are not to be subjected to learning tedious facts. The result is a nearly content-free document that lays out only broad concepts and generalities, and fails to offer teachers and students meaningful historical guidance.

## Goals and Organization

North Carolina’s standards provide outlines for individual grades, K–8. Each grade’s content is divided into five strands: history, geography and environmental literacy, economics and financial literacy, civics and governance, and culture. Each strand is then subdivided into a series of thematic “essential standards,” each of which is in turn provided with “clarifying objectives,” which are issues that students are expected to explain or discuss, with some historical specifics mentioned as examples. At the high school level, grade-specific outlines are replaced with subject-specific courses, each focusing on a single strand (history, government, etc.). Short introductory texts lay out the goals for each grade or high school course.

In Kindergarten through third grade, students are introduced to “change over time,” and similar general concepts. North Carolina history enters in fourth grade.

Lack of substantive detail leaves course scope barely defined; nonetheless, course titles and headings indicate that fifth grade is meant to run from pre-settlement to Reconstruction; eighth grade revisits the period from the American Revolution onward, then continues from Reconstruction to the present. Two full-year courses are provided at the high school level: U.S. History I covers from pre-settlement to Reconstruction; U.S. History II continues to the present.

## Evaluation

To create “enduring, clear, and measurable” standards, North Carolina sought to “pare down” its already weak standards “to identify what is essential.” The resulting document focuses explicitly on “broad concepts of social studies,” *not* on historical content. The “clarifying objectives” are said “to include more specificity,” but they merely mention scattered, random issues and events without any context, explanation, or chronological coherence.

Students are expected to “expand their ability to think like a historian by asking questions that historians ask,” going “beyond memorization of isolated facts to the development

### DOCUMENTS REVIEWED<sup>1</sup>

**North Carolina Essential Standards:  
Social Studies, U.S. history segments  
(second revised draft, 2010)**

**Accessed from:**

<http://www.ncpublicschools.org/acre/standards/phase2/>

<sup>1</sup> Though these North Carolina social studies standards are still in draft form, they have already undergone multiple rounds of revision and are likely to see only minor tweaks before implementation. The standards from 2006, which will be phased out with the adoption of the 2010 standards, can be found here: <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/curriculum/socialstudies/scos/>.

of higher level thinking skills.” But how, one must ask, are students to “think like a historian” if no core of historical knowledge is delineated? The Tar Heel State standards leave all such matters to local districts and teachers, who are to be given “flexibility in the content examples that they may elect to use in order to support the concepts.”

In the early grades, students are simply directed to understand huge, general concepts such as “change over time”; the only detail given is a list of commemorative holidays. The fourth-grade local history course merely offers such directives as “analyze the chronology of key historical events in North Carolina history.” The linked “clarifying objectives”—meant to add specifics—tell students, for instance, to “analyze North Carolina’s role in major conflicts and wars from the Pre-Colonial period through Reconstruction.”

Fifth grade ostensibly introduces American history through Reconstruction. Yet apart from the course title, the scope would hardly be discernible from the vague and non-specific content. Students are, for example, to “analyze the chronology of key events in the United States,” with clarifying objectives that briefly mention, for instance, “the political, economic and social aspects of colonial life in the thirteen colonies,” or “the impact of major conflicts, battles and wars on the development of our nation through Reconstruction.” They are also to “understand the role of prominent figures.” Here, examples simply list “the contributions of ‘the Founding Fathers’ to the development of our country,” “key historical figures [that] have exemplified values and principles of American democracy,” and “the changing roles of women and minorities” in America “from Pre-Colonial through Reconstruction.” The economics strand invokes market economics and personal choice. The civics and governance strand mentions democracy and citizenship, briefly invoking the Constitution and Bill of Rights with no explanatory detail. The culture strand mentions diversity.

Despite its near-total lack of specifics, the civics strand does find space to perpetuate the myth of the Iroquois League as a major influence on American government, listing “Iroquois” along with Roman, Greek, European, and British as the key ideas that “influenced the development of the United States government.”

Eighth grade is meant to offer “more rigorous study” of U.S. and North Carolina history. But the headings remain thematic and hopelessly broad; for instance, students are asked to “apply historical thinking to understand the creation and development of North Carolina and the United States.” And the clarifying objectives remain vague to the point of incoherence; for example, students should “explain the impact of economic, political, social and military conflicts,” such as “war, slavery, states’ rights and citizenship and immigration policies.”

Thematic blocks make nonsense of chronology, as well: An item on migration dizzily lumps together “westward movement, African slavery, Trail of Tears, the Great Migration and Ellis and Angel Island [sic].”

Often, there are no examples at all. One item simply tells students to “explain how individuals and groups have influenced economic, political and social change in North Carolina and the United States.”

Tendentious and politicized emphases also recur. In the government strand, students are to “analyze access to democratic rights and freedoms among various groups in North Carolina and the United States (e.g., enslaved people, women, wage earners, landless farmers, American Indians, African Americans and other ethnic groups).” Note that only historically marginalized groups are included.

North Carolina originally intended to include only post-Reconstruction U.S. history at the high school level, until public backlash forced state officials to place a full, two-year U.S. history course in high school. But given that course’s sketchy and disorganized specifics, it seems to make little difference what time span the standards purport to cover. Students are, for instance, to “analyze key political, economic and social turning points in United States history using historical thinking”; examples include “conflicts, legislation, elections, innovations, leadership, movements, Supreme Court decisions, etc.” Or they are to “analyze how conflict and compromise have shaped politics, economics and culture” in the United States. The accompanying examples, with theme again trouncing chronology or context, are “mercantilism, Revolutionary Era taxation, National Bank, taxes, tariffs, territorial expansion, [and the] Civil War.”

Indeed, the two-part high school course is so generalized that the thematic headings for U.S. History I & II are *identical*. Only the examples differ. Each outline is barely six pages long, including the introduction, and much is empty space, both literally and figuratively.

## Content and Rigor Conclusion

Apart from thematic issues, historical content is more or less absent from these standards. Indeed, specific content is all but dismissed as too confining for students and too limiting for teachers. In the near-absence of content, rigor is impossible. What content there is, nonetheless, manages to stress political bias and presentism—that is, judgments of the past through the lens of today’s values, standards, and norms. There is no hint of a historical outline, and no meaningful guidance to teachers, students, or parents about constructing one. A few bare references to historical facts earn a marginal one out of

seven for Content and Rigor. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

### **Clarity and Specificity Conclusion**

North Carolina’s sequence is perfectly clear and superficially sensible: U.S. history is introduced in fifth grade, reiterated and expanded in eighth grade, and revisited in its entirety in high school. Unfortunately, scope is another matter altogether. The standards *have* no scope, since they do nothing more than mention disconnected themes and issues, with scattered and decontextualized facts tossed in as “examples.” Actual historical content is left solely to local districts and teachers, who are given no meaningful guidance in constructing their courses. Students cannot “analyze” or “understand” what they do not know, and these standards seem entirely uninterested in identifying or furnishing basic and necessary historical knowledge. North Carolina’s clear sequence and otherwise empty guidelines leave it with a one out of three for Clarity and Specificity. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

# NORTH DAKOTA • U.S. HISTORY



GRADE

**F**

SCORES

Content and Rigor 1/7  
Clarity and Specificity 1/3

TOTAL SCORE

**2/10**

## Overview

North Dakota's standards provide the bare bones of a historical outline, but there is little substantive detail with which to clothe them. A small number of brief "benchmarks" touch on overarching themes in U.S. history, but the few historical examples are scattered, fragmentary, and sometimes politically biased. Much of the standards' space is given to "achievement descriptors," which tell us little more than that proficient students should perform proficiently, without ever explaining what that actually means.

## Goals and Organization

North Dakota divides social studies into six strands, or "content standards": skills and resources; important historical events; economic concepts; government and citizenship; concepts of geography; and human development and behavior.

Each content standard is then divided by grade level, individually from K–8 and as a single unit for 9–12. "Benchmark expectations," constituting broad statements of target student achievement, are then provided for each grade or grade block and are grouped under thematic/chronological headings. "Achievement descriptors" are provided for each benchmark, but these do little more than restate said benchmarks, explaining that students at various levels of proficiency (advanced proficient, proficient, partially proficient and novice) will demonstrate comprehension that is "insightful," "relevant," "superficial," or "irrelevant."

Kindergarten through third grade introduce concepts of chronology, holidays, national symbols, and famous Americans. Fourth grade introduces North Dakota history.

The main U.S. history course is divided among grades five, eight, and high school. Fifth grade covers from pre-settlement to independence, eighth grade from independence to the late nineteenth century, and high school (grade unspecified) from "industrialization to the present."

## Evaluation

The North Dakota social studies standards claim to represent "an important step in defining and implementing what constitutes a quality education for North Dakota citizens." Even though they are intended to "encourage" a dynamic and living curriculum created at the local school-district level, North Dakota parents are nonetheless assured that they provide "guidance in core curriculum areas" and "focus on essential content."

Content, however, is hardly prominent in these standards. The relegation of history to a strand labeled "important historical events" immediately suggests an alarmingly selective

### DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

**North Dakota Content and Achievement Standards: Social Studies, Grades K–12, U.S. history segments (2007)**

*Accessed from:*

<http://www.dpi.state.nd.us/standard/content/ssstudies/index.shtm>

approach—as if Mel Brooks’s satirical “Highlights from Hamlet” had inspired these “Highlights from History.” And indeed, the benchmark expectations remain extraordinarily broad, with a random smattering of specific examples parenthetically tossed in. The achievement descriptors offer no additional detail or guidance, merely noting that an advanced-proficient student can meet the benchmark very well, a proficient student can meet it well, and so forth.

The decision to divide U.S. history into a single sequence over grades five, eight, and high school is, though common in many states, a further problem: Early material is relegated solely to early grades, where students’ comprehension is limited. Yet the brief and general benchmarks present little detail in *any* grade, failing to exploit high school students’ greater sophistication.

Early grades introduce the usual concepts of chronology, symbols, and famous people, pausing to emphasize “the exchange of ideas, culture, and goods between the Native Americans and the white settlers.” A politically slanted and chronologically muddled selection of famous persons offered to second graders is “George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, Susan B. Anthony, Abraham Lincoln, Harriet Tubman, Martin Luther King, Jr., Rosa Parks, César Chávez, [and] Sacagawea.” The fourth-grade introduction to North Dakota history is also exceedingly sketchy.

The fifth-grade U.S. history course opens with introductory benchmarks on “symbols” and “people and events.” Students are, for instance, to “explain the significance of scientists, inventors, and historical figures,” such as “Christopher Columbus, Juan Ponce De Leon, Benjamin Franklin, George Washington, Paul Revere, Benjamin Rush, David Rittenhouse, [and] Thomas Paine.” Subheadings divide the remaining benchmarks between “exploration and migration” and “colonization,” but only *eight* actual benchmarks cover the entire period through 1776.

Students are, for instance, to “explain how regional Native American groups influenced U.S. history”—but the only examples given are “historical events [and] development of the U.S.” They are also to explain the motives for European colonization, and describe the daily life of “large landowners, farmers, artisans, women, [and] slaves.” For the American Revolution, students are to “identify the reasons...for conflict between England and the American colonies,” the examples given being “Boston Tea Party, the Stamp Act, [and] English Laws.” Note that the 1773 Tea Party is placed *before* the 1765 Stamp Act. They are also to identify “the key people” of the Revolution, the examples being “George Washington, King George III, John Adams, [and] Paul Revere,” and “events and consequences of the Revolutionary War,” for which “Lexington,

Concord, Bunker Hill, Benedict Arnold, [and] Valley Forge” are alone named.

Although some of the most basic historical issues are touched upon, this outline provides no meaningful guidance to teachers or students. The examples, ripped from any context or explanation, are educationally useless.

Eighth grade, meant to cover the period from independence to the late nineteenth century, does so in just eleven benchmarks. After first analyzing “the transformation of the nation” across the entire period, students are, for instance, to consider early political parties and the issues they faced (“e.g., payment of debt, establishment of a national bank, strict or loose interpretation of the Constitution, [and] support for England or France”). They are also to explain how political leaders shaped national policy. The examples given—“Andrew Jackson, William Henry Harrison, Martin Van Buren, [and] John Tyler”—are bizarre. Harrison’s term lasted only thirty days and he had no influence on national policy; his successor, Tyler, popularly derided as “His Accidency,” had very limited influence. What about Henry Clay, Daniel Webster, John C. Calhoun, or James K. Polk, among many others? Similarly rushed and fragmentary items push through the antebellum era, Civil War, Reconstruction, and its aftermath.

The high school course opens with tribal governance in North Dakota and then moves to a single historical subheading: “U.S. Periods, Events, Figures, Movements to Include but Not Limited to Industrialization to Present.” Under this arcane heading, just ten benchmarks are provided. The first (nearly identical to that in eighth grade) directs students to evaluate “the transformation of the nation” across the period. They are then to cover World War I “at home and abroad (e.g., neutrality, military technologies, isolationism, Zimmerman Note, Lusitania, home front, [and] Wilson’s Fourteen Points)”, inter-war developments (“Red Scare, Roaring 20’s, Great Depression, [and the] New Deal”), the “causes, course, and legacy” of World War II (“totalitarian regimes, Pacific theater, European theater, [and the] home front”), and so forth, with similar items touching on the Cold War (“containment policy, arms race, [and] fear of communism”), civil rights, the Vietnam War, recent presidencies, and major contemporary issues (“e.g., immigration, environment, poverty, terrorism, and discrimination”).

A few additional details on the American Revolution and Constitution are mentioned under the civics content standard—but again without context or explanation.

## Content and Rigor Conclusion

North Dakota provides, at best, the skeleton of a historical outline. Though some key themes are mentioned in broad terms, the majority of American history is passed over. The few arbitrary details offered are divorced from context or chronology, and many suggest a politically motivated focus on minority groups at the expense of more comprehensive historical knowledge. Teachers attempting to follow these standards will find scant guidance for structuring a proper course, and students will find little summation of the “content” they are supposedly being asked to master. The decision to split U.S. history into a single course over elementary, middle, and high school is unfortunate, but grade-level rigor is essentially irrelevant at all levels. Little is in evidence anywhere, and the over-general benchmarks are much the same in every grade or grade block. Fleeting references to overarching historical issues merit no more than a one out of seven for Content and Rigor. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

## Clarity and Specificity Conclusion

The North Dakota standards offer only spotty coverage of essential U.S. history, and the typical division of all material into strands breaks up even the limited clarity offered by the extremely non-specific benchmarks. Detail is all but missing; the vagueness of the benchmarks makes it difficult to measure student success. The achievement descriptors merely tell us, in a classic edu-speak tautology, that proficient students will demonstrate proficiency. In the end, the *Content and Achievement Standards* contain hardly any content, and they offer few specifics with which to encourage or measure achievement. They earn a one out of three for Clarity and Specificity. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)



GRADE

**D**

SCORES

Content and Rigor **2/7**  
Clarity and Specificity **1/3**

TOTAL SCORE

**3/10**

## Overview

Ohio’s standards offer, at best, an exceedingly broad and basic outline of U.S. history. Huge swaths of history are covered in a few brief strokes, and specific events and people are all but absent.

## Goals and Organization

Ohio’s social studies standards provide grade-specific outlines for pre-K–8. Each grade is assigned a topical “theme” (e.g., “Communities: Past and Present, Near and Far,” “Ohio in the United States”) with a short explanatory paragraph. Each grade outline is then divided among four strands—history, geography, economics, and government—and each strand is divided into thematic or chronological “topics,” many of which are repeated across grades. Finally, each topic is provided with grade-specific “content statements” which constitute “the essential knowledge to be learned at each grade level or within each course.”

High school organization is largely identical, save that subject-specific courses replace the strands, and each topic receives a brief introductory paragraph. The courses are not assigned to any specific grade.

Kindergarten through third grade focus on broad concepts of community and change over time. Fourth grade introduces Ohio history. Fifth grade turns to a general overview of the entire Western hemisphere’s early history.

American history enters in eighth grade and covers the period from pre-settlement to Reconstruction. The high school course continues from Reconstruction to the present.

## Evaluation

Ohio’s standards claim to outline the “essential knowledge” that students should acquire through the social studies curriculum. Unfortunately, the state does not seem to consider substantive historical content to be “essential,” since very little is included.

In the elementary grades, Ohio’s standards place little emphasis on U.S. history. Early grades’ guiding themes include such general concepts—typical of the “expanding environments” approach to social studies—as “The Classroom Community” (pre-Kindergarten), “A Child’s Place in Time and Space” (Kindergarten), “Families Now and Long Ago, Near and Far” (first grade), “People Working Together” (second grade), and “Communities: Past and Present, Near and Far” (third grade). The history strand in these grades is divided between “historical thinking and skills” and “heritage” topics. A small number of very general content statements touch on basic concepts such as change,

### DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

**Ohio Academic Content Standards: Social Studies, PreK–8, U.S. history segments (2010)**

**Accessed from:**

<http://www.ode.state.oh.us/GD/Templates/Pages/ODE/ODEDetail.aspx?page=3&TopicRelationID=1706&ContentID=76598&Content=93224>

**Ohio Academic Content Standards: High School Social Studies Course Syllabi, U.S. history segments (2010)**

**Accessed from:**

<http://www.ode.state.oh.us/GD/Templates/Pages/ODE/ODEDetail.aspx?page=3&TopicRelationID=1706&ContentID=76598&Content=93224>

culture, and the impact of individual actions. The only specific reference is to a few American national symbols.

In the fourth-grade Ohio history course, the history strand offers a few modestly specific references to U.S. history (the Native American presence, African American immigration, the Northwest Ordinance, and technological innovation) but fails to offer a coherent historical outline. The other strands add generic references to diversity and constitutional government, but no additional U.S. history specifics.

In the fifth grade's general glance at the early Western hemisphere, the content statements are again exceedingly few, brief, and general. The history strand, for example, includes a topic subheading on early civilizations, which contains just a single content statement referring to the "unique governments," "social structures," "religions," "technologies," and "agricultural practices" of the Maya, Inca, Aztec, and Mississippian cultures. A statement under the heritage topic adds that "European exploration and colonization had lasting effects which can be used to understand the Western Hemisphere today." The other strands add no further specifics.

Eighth grade turns at last to American history but, even here, the outline provided is entirely inadequate as a substantive guide to teachers or students. After a historical thinking and skills topic, the history strand is divided into four chronological headings: "Colonization to Independence," "A New Nation," "Expansion," and "Civil War and Reconstruction." But these topics *combined* receive a mere *twelve* content statements. There are passing references to pre-contact Native American cultures, European exploration and colonization "for economic and religious reasons," competition between European empires, the rise of slavery, Enlightenment ideas, and "dissatisfaction with colonial rule" that led to the American Revolution. But these brief and general statements are devoid of specific events or dates, and they do not include the name of a single individual.

There are equally shallow references to the Articles of Confederation, early presidential administrations (again with no names), and westward expansion. The sectional crisis is reduced to "disputes over the nature of federalism, complicated by economic developments in the United States," resulting "in sectional issues, including slavery, which led to the American Civil War." Reconstruction is likewise reduced to "changes to the U.S. Constitution, an affirmation of federal authority and lingering social and political differences." The other strands add equally superficial references to the Constitution and the Industrial Revolution. This is the *only* coverage of American history through 1877 offered anywhere in Ohio's standards.

In the high school U.S. history course (no longer divided into strands), each topic receives a brief introductory statement. But these offer only broad generalities on each era's issues. The statement on "Industrialization and Progressivism (1877–1920)" for example, mentions the start of "large-scale industrialization...in the United States during the late 1800s... ignited by post-Civil War demand and fueled by technological advancements." "Growing industries," it continues, led to "foreign immigration" and "urbanization," giving "rise to the American labor movement," expanded western settlement, and a "period of progressive reform" in response to "political corruption and practices of big business."

Such topic summaries are marginally useful, but within the topics themselves, there are only *twenty-eight* very general content statements for the entire course. The aforementioned "Industrialism and Progressivism" receives five such content statements, referring to industrialization, urbanization, *laissez-faire*, post-Reconstruction racial systems, and Progressive response. But that is all there is—general references, entirely without specifics or historical individuals. Foreign policy from 1898–1930 receives just two content statements, mentioning the Spanish American War, World War I, and the failure to join the League of Nations. The topic's introductory paragraph says only that the "industrial and territorial growth of the United States fostered expansion overseas," and that "greater involvement in the world set the stage for American participation in World War I and attempts to preserve post-war peace."

Four content statements cover domestic developments from 1919 to 1941. Three more cover foreign affairs from 1930 to 1945: America's entry into World War II is mentioned only in the topic's brief textual introduction, which refers to "tyrannical governments" in "certain nations" and to Pearl Harbor without context or explanation. The remaining ten statements seek to address the Cold War (McCarthyism, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and the fall of Communism all appear), post-war social change (civil rights, the economic boom, population movement, and debates on federal power are mentioned only in passing), the modern global economy, and the post-9/11 world.

The government and economics courses include a few broad conceptual generalities but add no substantive historical coverage.

Ohio is now preparing optional "model curricula" to guide teachers through the official standards. These are meant to add some explanatory text about each of the content statements, but the statements are themselves so broad that even this voluntary supplement is unlikely to provide anything substantive.

## Content and Rigor Conclusion

There is little American history content or educational rigor in Ohio's standards. Before eighth grade, there is effectively none. The eighth-grade course offers a bit, attempting to cover the entire period in a handful of broad content statements. The high school course, while marginally more sophisticated, is still exceedingly brief and general; at best, it offers a *very* basic outline. There are no dates beyond the topic titles; hardly any specific events are mentioned and not a single person is named. Historical explanation and context are all but absent, leaving teachers and students largely on their own in constructing courses or comprehending the content. And even the limited improvement in rigor at the high school level applies only to U.S. history after 1877. Ohio's content earns a two out seven for Content and Rigor. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

## Clarity and Specificity Conclusion

Ohio's American history sequence is clear. Unfortunately, it is also inadequate. Little attempt is made to introduce anything of substance before middle school. Ohio history is ostensibly covered in fourth grade and the early history of the Western hemisphere in fifth grade, but neither is given more than a few generalizations with occasional references to facts or events. Eighth grade is meant to cover U.S. history to 1877, but offers only the most meager specifics; high school's coverage of 1877 to the present, though somewhat better, is still short on detail. Ohio's lack of detail and near-absence of meaningful sequence in the elementary grades leaves it with only one out of three for Clarity and Specificity. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

# OKLAHOMA • U.S. HISTORY



GRADE  
**B+**

**SCORES**

Content and Rigor 5/7  
Clarity and Specificity 3/3

**TOTAL SCORE**

**8/10**

## Overview

Oklahoma provides, on the whole, a solid and frequently impressive outline of U.S. history content, enhanced by the inclusion of expository statements that often supply explanation and context and go well beyond mere outlining. Unfortunately, the combination of erratic detail, some serious gaps and omissions, and relegation of all content before 1760 to fifth grade undermines these otherwise impressive standards.

## Goals and Organization

Oklahoma’s *Priority Academic Student Skills Guide* for social studies lays out three “core content areas”: history; geography; and civics, economics, and government. These themes are, however, integrated into unified courses. Content is *not* divided into strands.

The state provides grade-specific content outlines for grades K–8, and subject-specific course outlines for grades 9–12. Each grade or course is divided into a series of numbered “standards” which constitute thematic/chronological subdivisions. Each standard is further divided into numbered points, explaining ideas, skills or topics that students should master: These constitute the grade- or course-specific expectations.

Kindergarten through fourth grade introduce basic concepts of community, chronology, and change over time; fourth grade also includes brief content items on historical and geographical features of Oklahoma.

Fifth grade turns to U.S. history, covering the period from pre-settlement to 1850. Eighth grade covers the years from 1760 to 1877. The high school U.S. history course runs from 1850 the present.

## Evaluation

Oklahoma’s U.S. history standards display some notable strengths. At times, detail and substantive explanation are impressive; unfortunately, this level of quality is not consistently maintained. Some content items are little more than lists of people or events, largely without historical context. And some important historical content, which one would expect to find when so much *is* covered thoroughly, is missing altogether.

The state has also made two questionable sequencing decisions. First, rather than placing a two-year U.S. history course in high school, Oklahoma places the first year of its two-year course in eighth grade. Second, and more serious, the eighth-grade course begins in 1760, thus relegating the pre-settlement and colonial eras solely to fifth grade, when student understanding and retention are inevitably less developed.

DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

Oklahoma Priority Academic Student Skills: Social Studies, U.S. history segments (2010)

**Accessed from:**

<http://www.sde.state.ok.us/Curriculum/PASS/Subject/socstud.pdf>

Historical content in Kindergarten through third grade is general and largely thematic. A very brief and general discussion of Oklahoma’s historical and geographical background is included in fourth grade.

Fifth grade then turns to the history of early America. Considering the grade level, the content outline can be quite impressive, offering short expository statements rather than mere lists. Students are asked, for example, to “describe early European settlements in colonial America (e.g., Jamestown, Plymouth Plantations, Massachusetts Bay, and New Amsterdam), and identify reasons people came to the Americas (e.g., economic opportunity, slavery, escape from religious persecution, military adventure, and release from prison)” — a reasonably informative summary. Other items are far too general, for instance, “relate the contributions of important individuals and groups (e.g., John Smith, John Rolfe, Puritans, Pilgrims, Peter Stuyvesant, Roger Williams, Anne Hutchinson, Lord Baltimore, Quakers, William Penn, and James Oglethorpe)” — a list both incomplete (why Anne Hutchinson and not John Winthrop?) and lacking explanatory context.

Coverage at the fifth-grade level remains broad yet competent, touching on the French and Indian War and its connection to the American Revolution—neglected in many states; the ideas of the Declaration of Independence; the drafting of the Constitution; and on into the Jacksonian era, expansion, and reform movements. This overview, though somewhat elementary, is not inappropriate for the grade level. The somewhat basic coverage would not therefore be a problem, *if* all the material were covered again at a subsequent higher level.

Eighth-grade U.S. history begins with the Revolutionary crisis. What follows is uneven, ranging from overly general to admirably thorough. The section on the American Revolution is impressive, discussing the consequences of the French and Indian War, the Treaty of Paris, the Proclamation of 1763, the Sugar, Stamp, and Declaratory Acts, and the concept of taxation without representation. Coverage of independence and the war itself, though selective, is intelligent and well-explained. Most unusually, state constitutions, the dispute over western lands under the Articles of Confederation, and the Northwest Ordinance are discussed. The party schism and election of 1800 (missing in fifth grade) are mentioned, as are *Marbury v. Madison* and *McCulloch v. Maryland*.

Yet the Constitutional Convention and ratification are only mentioned rather than explained; the John Adams presidency and its important controversies are missing; and events up to the War of 1812 are presented only in brief. “The rise of sharecropping”—a post-Civil War development—is confusingly placed in a section otherwise devoted to the early nineteenth

century, which deals with the slave system and antebellum economic changes.

Stronger units address the nature of Jacksonian democracy, the National Bank, the nullification crisis, Native American removal, the schism over slavery, reform movements, and utopian experiments. To some extent, theme is allowed to trump chronology in this period. As one example, a section on westward expansion abruptly jumps back to the Louisiana Purchase, moving through Texas independence and the Mexican War, immigration, Mormonism, and Native American displacement—into the 1870s, no less—before moving back to the roots of the Civil War. This chronological jumbling leads to some key omissions; for example, the Compromise of 1850, the Kansas-Nebraska Act, Dred Scott, and John Brown are discussed—but the Missouri Compromise, which undergirds them all, is missing. Motives for fighting the Civil War and relative Northern/Southern strengths are discussed too briefly; the same is true of Reconstruction, where key issues are identified but too little detail provided.

High school U.S. history recapitulates the period from 1850 before continuing to the present. The structure remains generally chronological, but curious gaps persist. Events underlying the secession crisis are listed, but there is no direct reference to the key issue behind them all: the expansion of slavery into the territories. (The Missouri Compromise, which Jefferson compared to “a fire bell in the night,” still goes unmentioned.) Key points of the Civil War and Reconstruction are listed briefly though intelligently. But Andrew Johnson’s impeachment, mentioned in eighth grade, is now missing.

Solid items, offering considerable contextual explanation, are included for the key social and reform issues of the later nineteenth century: immigration, westward movement and Native American policy, industrialization, and the labor movement. Discussion of Progressivism includes frequently omitted details, such as the muckrakers, the child labor and conservation movements, the direct primary, initiative, and referendum and recall. Individual reformers such as Susan B. Anthony, Upton Sinclair, William Jennings Bryan, and Theodore Roosevelt are included. Yet political history is barely addressed; the crucial election of 1912 is skipped, and the Wilson administration is discussed almost solely in terms of World War I (though domestic propaganda and the Red Scare are mentioned).

The period through the Great Depression, World War II, and the Cold War and its aftermath is covered in frequently impressive detail. The nuclear arms race, McCarthyism, civil rights, and the women’s movement, as examples, all receive even-handed coverage, often with well-integrated and well-chosen detail. (For example, the standards include the rise of racial tensions

in the 1920s, important content that is rarely mentioned in other states). Yet political history is again given short shrift (Lyndon Johnson, for instance, is never mentioned, nor is the Great Society). Some events that one would expect to find (the 1925 Scopes trial, for example) are missing. And there are occasional oddities (Woody Guthrie is listed alongside Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt, Will Rogers, and Huey Long as a key figure “between the wars”—presumably because he was born in Oklahoma—even though he was little known in those years).

### **Content and Rigor Conclusion**

Oklahoma’s coverage of historical content is generally solid and often impressive. The use of expository statements, rather than strict outlining, allows important issues to be explained, not just listed. Unfortunately, depth and quality are erratic. Some material is handled too broadly and briefly, or is omitted entirely; some sections abandon a chronological format for awkward thematic groupings, moving events out of proper context and allowing important material to fall through the cracks. There is a clear and appropriate increase in rigor between grade levels—but this highlights the problematic decision to relegate the colonial period to the very basic fifth-grade course. Oklahoma flirts with excellence. Closing gaps and covering colonial history again after fifth grade could make it first rate. The state receives a five out of seven for Content and Rigor. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

### **Clarity and Specificity Conclusion**

Oklahoma’s straightforward grade-by-grade outlines make the sequence clear and specific. The content to be covered in each grade is clearly noted, and the standards for each grade/course delineate that content without confusing jargon. Despite the gaps in detail noted above, the document is solidly constructed and provides an intelligent historical guide—one students and teachers should easily be able to understand and to employ. The Sooner State receives a three out of three for Clarity and Specificity. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

# OREGON • U.S. HISTORY



GRADE

**F**

SCORES

Content and Rigor 1/7  
Clarity and Specificity 1/3

TOTAL SCORE

**2/10**

## Overview

Oregon’s U.S. history standards are vague to the point of absurdity. The content—assigned to grade bands, not individual grades—is scanty, gap-ridden, and hopelessly general, not even approaching a usable historical outline. And what little content there is focuses heavily on the mistreatment of minorities, all but ignoring other aspects of the nation’s past.

## Goals and Organization

Oregon provides “social science” standards for grade bands K–3, 4–5, 6–8, and high school. Each grade-band outline is divided among five strands: civics and government, economics, geography, history, and social science analysis.

The strands are further divided into thematic sub-strands, common across all grades; within each sub-strand, one or more headings lay out broad content expectations for the grade band. More detailed content items are sometimes supplied beneath such headings.

The history strand is, in all grade bands, divided into nine sub-strands: five “historical skills” headings (covering chronology; cause and effect; continuity and change; diverse perspectives; and connections among economic, social, political, and cultural spheres) in addition to world history, U.S. history, and two state and local history sub-strands. If U.S. history content is assigned to a given grade band, the heading beneath the “U.S. history” sub-strand indicates the time span to be covered in that grade band (the middle school grade band’s U.S. history heading, for instance, directs students to “understand how individuals, issues, and events changed or significantly influenced the course of U.S. history post-American Revolution through 1900”).

The grade band covering Kindergarten through third grade contains no specific U.S. history content; the scarce content under the history strand mentions calendars, chronological sequences, and “events from local history.”

The U.S. history sequence is split into a single course over the grade bands for fourth and fifth grade, sixth through eighth grade, and high school. The fourth- and fifth-grade band covers pre-settlement to the American Revolution; the sixth- through eighth-grade band from the Revolution to 1900; and the high school band from 1900 to the present.

## Evaluation

Oregon claims to have “adopted world-class academic standards” in social sciences, calling its Standards by Design “a comprehensive blueprint” for academic content that

### DOCUMENTS REVIEWED<sup>1</sup>

**Oregon Standards by Design: Third Grade, Fifth Grade, Eighth Grade and High School for Social Sciences, U.S. history segments (2001)**

**Accessed from:**

<http://www.ode.state.or.us/teachlearn/real/standards/sbd.aspx> Oregon Standards by Design: Third Grade, Fifth Grade, Eighth Grade and High School for Social Sciences, U.S. history segments (2001)

<sup>1</sup> Oregon’s social science standards are provided in two forms: a pdf of the original standards released in 2001 and a more recent interactive “Standards by Design” website. While the presentation and organization differ, the content of both is identical. For the purposes of this review, we evaluated the “Standards by Design” version, the most up-to-date form of the standards. Oregon also has a set of draft standards, dated November 2010, available here: [http://www.ode.state.or.us/teachlearn/subjects/socialscience/standards/oregon\\_k-12\\_ss\\_standards\\_10-27-10.pdf](http://www.ode.state.or.us/teachlearn/subjects/socialscience/standards/oregon_k-12_ss_standards_10-27-10.pdf). Since these standards have not yet been formally adopted, and could likely still undergo substantive changes, they were not included in this review.

clearly outlines “what students should know and be able to do.” The standards document also “gratefully acknowledges the Indiana Department of Education for allowing the modification of some of their materials for use in this document.”

This seems like a promising start, especially since Indiana’s U.S. history standards are among the best in the land. Furthermore, by using the term “social sciences,” Oregon seems to be distancing itself from the flawed conceptual models of social studies. Sadly, closer examination of the Oregon standards reveals the usual social studies strands and skills categories. And Oregon’s content outlines bear scant resemblance to Indiana’s clear and detailed standards.

Early grades are assigned no history content at all. Kindergarten through third grade receives just two content headings: a directive to “understand calendar time sequences and chronological sequences within narratives” and another to “understand events from local history.” American “national symbols, heroes, and patriotic songs” are mentioned under civics, without any examples, as is a directive to “identify the rights that people have in their communities.”

American history, such as it is, enters in fourth and fifth grades. The heading under the U.S. history sub-strand instructs students to “understand how individuals, issues, and events changed or significantly influenced the course of U.S. history from pre-history through the period of the American Revolution.” The U.S. history headings for sixth through eighth grade and high school are identical, save for the time period named.

Under this broad heading, fourth and fifth grade receive *five* content items for the entire period. Students are to:

- “Identify and understand the groups living in the Western Hemisphere before European exploration, their ways of life, and the empires they developed.”
- “Understand the impact of early European exploration on Native Americans and on the land.”
- “Understand the impact of individuals through the period of the American Revolution, on ideas, ways of life, or the course of events in U.S. history.”
- “Understand the colonial experience and how it led to the American Revolution.”
- “Identify and understand the causes, course, and impact of the American Revolution, including the roles of George Washington, Samuel Adams, and Thomas Jefferson.”

One might just as well direct students to “understand American history through the Revolution,” and leave it at that.

Grades six through eight, ostensibly covering the period from the Revolution to 1900, provide only fifteen content items. The sparse content focuses heavily on the oppression of minority groups, while swaths of basic history are ignored. There are brief references to “the issues and events” of the Constitutional Convention, along with Jacksonian democracy, the Civil War, and Reconstruction. Students are also to understand the effects of westward migration, Manifest Destiny, immigration, and urbanization “on indigenous populations and newcomers,” but not, it seems, in any other terms. They are also to focus on the slave trade, abolitionism, the “experiences of enslaved African-Americans”—itself a contrived and historically disingenuous term—“and ‘free Blacks’ in the United States” as well as “how African-Americans dealt with the conditions of their enslavement and used religion and family to create a viable culture to cope with the effects of slavery.” After Reconstruction, they are mainly to focus on “the effects of Indian Wars and the opening of the West on Native American tribes,” the Irish potato famine—which of course occurred *before* the Civil War—and the general “effect of territorial expansion on other nations and their people.”

There is hardly a reference to any specific individual or event; injustices to various groups receive most of the segment’s limited attention. The establishment and expansion of American democracy are all but ignored.

Matters get even worse in high school, where the U.S. history segment devotes just *seven content items to the entire post-1900 period*. Students are to understand nineteenth- and early twentieth-century reform movements, “the concerns, successes, and limitations of Progressivism,” and how new technologies transformed work and labor in the twentieth century. They are then to digest “the changes in society and culture in the early 20th century,” along with “the causes of the Great Depression” and its effect “on the American family;” how Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal “addressed the Great Depression, redefined the role of government, and had a profound impact on American life;” and “the changes that created the economic boom after World War II.” Some decontextualized references to the civil rights movement and modern constitutional interpretation appear under civics—and that’s it. There is nothing approaching a coherent or usable historical outline.

## Content and Rigor Conclusion

Oregon’s standards provide only hints of historical content—so broad, selective, and fragmentary as to verge on the ludicrous. There are no specifics at any point; even the overly general directives leave gaps. Much of American history’s space is given over to the negative experiences of minority

groups. The other side of American history, the struggle for democracy and justice, is essentially ignored. The decision to split the entire U.S. history sequence into a single course over grade bands ranging from fourth grade through high school would matter if any of the grade levels demanded content and rigor. But, in fact, the high school course provides no greater sophistication than does the fourth- and fifth-grade course—early periods are shortchanged, and later eras are treated no better. The extremely general references to actual historical content earn Oregon a marginal one out of seven for Content and Rigor. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

### **Clarity and Specificity Conclusion**

Not only does Oregon provide minimal curricular detail and divide material into arbitrary strands, it provides outlines only for broad grade bands, not individual grades. In addition, the outlines are splintered into thematic and conceptual strands and sub-strands. And the content split among those subdivisions lacks detail or specificity. Such empty, content-free standards provide hardly any guidance to teachers in structuring a course, and they give students little sense of what is expected. Oregon claims to have “adopted world-class academic standards.” If so, the authors of these standards seem to be living in a world of their own invention. The state barely receives a one out of three for Clarity and Specificity. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

# PENNSYLVANIA • U.S. HISTORY



GRADE

**F**

SCORES

Content and Rigor 1/7  
Clarity and Specificity 1/3

TOTAL SCORE

**2/10**

Pennsylvania presently has two sets of social studies standards. The 2002 standards remain legally in force for the state's public schools. Yet new standards were completed in 2009 as part of the Keystone State's new Standards Aligned System (SAS). These new standards are "offered as a voluntary resource for Pennsylvania's schools and await action by the State Board of Education." Yet the new SAS version is given considerably more prominence on the state's website than the 2002 standards. Pennsylvania also cautions educators that new graduation requirements set to take effect in 2015 are keyed to the SAS standards.

As a result, both the 2002 and 2009 versions are reviewed here. Regrettably, the new version is even worse than the old.

## 2002 STANDARDS'

### Overview

Pennsylvania's 2002 U.S. history standards offer no historical outline and little specific content. They amount to little more than thematic boxes into which fragmentary examples are tossed without context, coherence, or explanation.

### Goals and Organization

Pennsylvania's 2002 social studies standards are divided into four strands—civics and government, economics, geography, and history. (Each strand receives its own separate standards document.) The history strand is divided into four "standard categories," or sub-strands: historical analysis and skills development; Pennsylvania history; United States history; and world history. Each sub-strand is further divided into fixed thematic "standard statements" and accompanying "standard descriptors" for grade blocks 1–3, 4–6, 7–9, and 10–12.

For the grade blocks from fourth through twelfth grade, four standard statements are used for the U.S. and Pennsylvania history sub-strands: "(A) Political and Cultural Contributions of Individuals and Groups," "(B) Primary Documents, Material Artifacts and Historical Places," "(C) How Continuity and Change Has Influenced History," and "(D) Conflict and Cooperation Among Social Groups and Organizations." Twenty standard descriptors, or thematic sub-headings, are then distributed among the four standard statements (these include such categories as inhabitants; political leaders; military leaders; cultural and commercial leaders; innovators and reformers; politics; domestic instability; labor

#### DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

**Pennsylvania Academic Standards for History, U.S. history segments (2002)**

**Accessed from:**

<http://pennsylvaniasocialstudies.wikispaces.com/file/view/E+HISTORY+web03.pdf>

<sup>1</sup> For Pennsylvania's 2009 standards, see page 129.

relations; and military conflicts). Specific historical examples may then be provided for the various thematic descriptors.

Organization for the block encompassing first through third grade is similar, except that some descriptors are replaced by more basic thematic categories (students are, for instance, to identify historical “role models” rather than political or military leaders).

American and Pennsylvania history are assigned to all grade blocks: First through third grade deals with “Beginnings to Present”; fourth through sixth grade covers “Beginnings to 1824”; seventh through ninth grade covers 1787–1914; and tenth through twelfth grade finishes up with 1890–present.

## Evaluation

History, the Pennsylvania standards assert, “is a narrative—a story. In order to tell the story it is not sufficient to simply recall facts; it is also necessary to understand the context of the time and place and to apply historical thinking skills.” The standards also explain that the level of historical content and “the degree of comprehension” should become more sophisticated as the student moves up through the grades.

These are worthy sentiments. But Pennsylvania seems to pay little heed to its own exhortations. Instead, the Commonwealth’s idiosyncratic and disjointed standards drain everything historical from the study of history and fail to establish connections among people, ideas, and events. Indeed, they lack all but the most fragmentary substance; the U.S. history sub-strand, for all grade blocks, is just three pages long.

The state’s course sequence would ordinarily be a further flaw, with the middle school course starting in 1787 and colonial history relegated solely to elementary school. But since Pennsylvania’s standards lack any specific substance or chronological sense of time, place, or context, this problem hardly seems to make much difference.

First through third grade introduces the practice of splitting random and fragmentary examples among arbitrary thematic “descriptors.” Brief lists of names are offered (heavy on women and minorities), along with scattered historic documents and monuments; a few broad concepts are invoked—such as working conditions, military conflict, immigration, and diversity—without explanation or examples.

From fourth grade onward, students are meant to study U.S. and Pennsylvania history in earnest. Yet, instead of focusing on history, the standards focus on their rigid lists of thematic statements and descriptors. The few examples offered for each descriptor constitute little more than checklists grouped by

theme, with no chronological or contextual logic. Moreover, despite the standards’ stated commitment to an increasing level of historical content coverage, the only difference between grade blocks is that the handful of examples for each category relate to that grade block’s assigned time period.

The twenty descriptors work like twenty boxes in a mail sorting room: The standards, in effect, take a few historical fragments and drop each into an applicable box—though not necessarily the *most* applicable one. Take, for instance, the five descriptors attached to the first standard statement (“Political and Cultural Contributions of Individuals and Groups”). In the block spanning seventh through ninth grade (covering 1787–1914), examples for the “inhabitants” descriptor include “Native Americans, Africans and Europeans,” listed without further elaboration or explanation. Next comes the “political leaders” descriptor, for which the examples are Daniel Webster, Abraham Lincoln, and Andrew Johnson. For “military leaders,” we encounter Andrew Jackson, Robert E. Lee, and Ulysses S. Grant. “Cultural and commercial leaders” are represented by Jane Addams, Jacob Riis, and Booker T. Washington. For “innovators and reformers,” we are given Alexander Graham Bell, Frances E. Willard, and Frederick Douglass.

Why should Jackson and Grant, both American presidents, be classified as military leaders and not as political leaders? Why should Jane Addams not be thought of as a reformer as well as a cultural leader? Why should Frederick Douglass not be described as a political leader as well as a reformer? And, of course, how can these isolated examples possibly constitute any meaningful outline or historical explanation?

A similar pattern is followed in the other grade blocks and standard statements. Under the “conflict and cooperation” statement for fourth through sixth grade, for instance, the Salem witch trials and Shays’ Rebellion are thrust together as examples of “domestic instability,” while tenth through twelfth grade tosses out both world wars and the “War on Terrorism”—without even giving dates—as examples of “military conflict.”

The same rigidities and shortcomings beset the Pennsylvania history sub-strand as well—the only difference being that the scattershot examples are confined to Pennsylvania. The separate standards document for civics and government, save for a few references to important documents, contains hardly any specifics at all; the geography and economics strands also add no substantive historical content or explanation.

## Content and Rigor Conclusion

Pennsylvania’s thematic categories are historically hollow and educationally vacuous—unless their purpose is to guarantee

that young people will be bored. No rigor is implied for any grade, and the rote repetition of identical thematic categories precludes any increase in sophistication for later grade blocks. The handful of examples touch on some important moments, people, and issues in American history, but do so without coherence, connection, context, or explanation—and most of U.S. history is missing completely. The authors of the Pennsylvania standards have abrogated the responsibility to set priorities and establish a coherent core of essential knowledge about our national history. Instead, they have created a curious echo of “Trivial Pursuit.” The state earns a bare one out of seven for Content and Rigor. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

### **Clarity and Specificity Conclusion**

Pennsylvania lays out its sequence in a simple introductory list. That, unfortunately, is the only moment of clarity in the document. The remainder is a confusing chart of sub-strands, statements, descriptors, and examples, all of which offer little more than generalities. Historical specifics are scattered, shallow, or absent. The minimal outline of course scope earns the state a one out of three for Clarity and Specificity. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

# PENNSYLVANIA • U.S. HISTORY



GRADE

**F**

SCORES

Content and Rigor 0/7  
Clarity and Specificity 0/3

TOTAL SCORE

**0/10**

## 2009 STANDARDS<sup>1</sup>

### Overview

Pennsylvania claims that its 2009 social studies standards—reviewed here despite their “voluntary” status—will guide its students to a “common cultural literacy.” But, in a theory-based rejection of mere “recall,” these standards *omit historical facts altogether*, offering nothing but abstractions about unspecified content. As weak as the state’s 2002 standards are, this new version is even weaker. The 2002 version was already rigidly thematic, providing only disjointed historical specifics. The 2009 version follows a similar organization—but deletes even the meager historical specifics found in the earlier version.

### Goals and Organization

The 2009 standards divide social studies into four strands: civics, economics, geography, and history. As in the 2002 version, each strand receives its own separate standards document. The history strand is divided into four sub-strands, identical to those in the 2002 standards. The U.S. and Pennsylvania history sub-strands are divided into four thematic headings or “standard statements,” again taken from the 2002 standards: contributions of individuals and groups; historical documents and artifacts; impact of continuity and change on U.S. [or Pennsylvania] history; and conflict and cooperation.

Under each standard statement, a single, purely theoretical content expectation is individually provided for each grade three through nine and for twelfth grade. In tenth and eleventh grades, three subject-specific courses—“U.S. History 1850–Present,” “World History 1450–Present,” and “Civics and Government”—replace the individual grade-level standards; like the grade-level standards, each course receives a single content expectation for each standard statement. (It is not specified how the three courses are to be arranged over the two years).

Pennsylvania’s 2002 standards did assign particular time spans to broad grade blocks. But the 2009 version, though it now offers standards for individual grades and courses, does not include even the most basic grade-level sequence. The content expectations in the 2009 standards are wholly conceptual and thematic, mentioning no specific history. There is, therefore, no indication of what periods or subjects are to be taught in a given grade, the sole exception being the U.S. history course assigned to grades ten and eleven, which specifies “1850–present” in its title.

### ✓ DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

**Pennsylvania Academic Standards for History: Elementary Standards, Grades 3–8, U.S. history segments (2009)**

**Accessed from:**

<http://pennsylvaniasocialstudies.wikispaces.com/file/view/HISTORY+ELEMENTARY+STANDARDS+JUNE+1+2009+FINAL.doc>

**Pennsylvania Academic Standards for History: Elementary Standards, Grades 9–12, U.S. history segments (2009)**

**Accessed from:**

<http://pennsylvaniasocialstudies.wikispaces.com/file/view/HISTORY+SECONDARY+STANDARDS+JUNE+1+2009+FINAL.doc>

<sup>1</sup> For Pennsylvania’s 2002 standards, see page 126.

## Evaluation

Pennsylvania’s new history standards, we are told, “describe what students should know and be able to do at third through twelfth grade.” But, in fact, the state focuses on broad analytical “concepts” even more relentlessly than in the earlier version. In 2002, there were inadequate historical specifics. Now, in a total surrender to the “how-to-think not what-to-learn” mantra of social studies, there are literally *none*.

While promising to promote a “common cultural literacy,” Pennsylvania’s 2009 standards stress “the need to move beyond recall”—as if retaining factual knowledge would interfere with broader student understanding. The standards, we are told, are not meant to provide “a list of facts to recall,” but rather to “provide a history framework” for schools and teachers: All content provided “is general and does not represent a course or even a portion thereof.” Here, at least, the state’s claims are indisputable: These standards lack even a hint of facts, and the content provided certainly fails to provide “even a portion” of a course outline.

Individual schools are “encouraged to move beyond these standards.” They had better, or there will be no history education at all in Pennsylvania.

The 2009 standards, it must be reiterated, contain *no history whatsoever*. At no point is a single person, event, or era mentioned—not even the most basic landmarks in American history such as the Revolution and the Civil War. In the separate standards for the civics strand, the Declaration of Independence, Constitution, and Bill of Rights are merely listed. That is as close to historical substance as the 2009 social studies standards ever come.

The Standards Aligned System website claims that the new standards “increase in complexity and sophistication as students progress through school.” But, in fact, the single abstract (and meaningless) content expectation offered under each of the four thematic statement headings is usually repeated, almost verbatim, at each successive grade or course level.

Under the “contributions of individuals and groups” heading, for example, third graders are told to “identify and describe the social, political, cultural, and economic contributions of individuals and groups in United States history”—and that’s all. Fourth graders are to “differentiate common characteristics” of these contributions. Fifth graders are to “compare and contrast” these common characteristics. Sixth graders are to “explain” individual and group contributions. Seventh graders are to “classify” them, and so forth. Even the sole subject-themed U.S. history course, high school’s 1850–Present unit, merely asks students to “compare the role groups and individuals played in the social, political, cultural,

and economic development of the U.S.” In no grade or course is any specific historical example given to supplement these absurdly broad directives.

Under the “continuity and change” heading, students are—at all grade levels—to consider how continuity and change have impacted “belief systems and religions,” “commerce and industry,” “technology,” “politics and government,” “physical and human geography,” and “social organizations.” These categories adapt some of the thematic descriptors from the 2002 standards, but *without* even the limited historical specifics offered in the earlier standards. Under the “conflict and cooperation” heading, students at all grade levels are to discuss how “conflict and cooperation among groups and organizations” have affected “ethnicity and race,” “working conditions,” “immigration,” “military conflict,” and “economic stability.” Again, some of the previous standards’ descriptors have been adapted—and again, even the previous standards’ meager historical examples have been deleted.

And that is the sum total of Pennsylvania’s 2009 U.S. history standards (the content standards for Pennsylvania history repeat the U.S. history expectations almost verbatim). The three other strands offer further brief, general, and theoretical content expectations for each grade and for the tenth- and eleventh-grade courses. Yet again, the content expectations are almost identical at each grade or course level, adding no historical substance or specifics.

## Content and Rigor Conclusion

Pennsylvania has, in its 2009 standards, largely recycled the rigid thematic categories it imposed in 2002. Now, however, the state has removed even the few historical specifics present in the original document. In short, the authors have taken a bad document and made it worse. Pennsylvania’s content-free standards earn a zero out of seven for Content and Rigor. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

## Clarity and Specificity Conclusion

Clarity and specificity apply no better to these standards than do content or rigor. Detail—already skimpy in the 2002 version—does not exist at all in the 2009 standards. The 2002 document at least assigned specific time spans to its grade blocks; here, there is neither sequence nor any hint of the substance to be taught at any level, save for a vague indication, only in the course title, that U.S. history after 1850 will be covered in tenth and eleventh grades. Pennsylvania’s website touts its “clear, high standards”—but it has set no bar, and offered no guidance or instruction. The standards deserve and receive a zero out of three for Clarity and Specificity. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

# RHODE ISLAND • U.S. HISTORY



GRADE  
**N/A**

SCORES  
Content and Rigor **N/A**  
Clarity and Specificity **N/A**

TOTAL SCORE  
**N/A**

As of 2010, Rhode Island has chosen not to implement statewide social studies standards.

“In accordance with a Rhode Island statute on civic education,” the state Department of Education notes on its website, “in 2006 the Rhode Island Department of Education developed the Rhode Island Grade Span Expectations (GSEs) for Civics & Government and Historical Perspectives/Rhode Island History (commonly known as the Civics GSEs) for K–12 implementation in all districts.” These GSEs, as close as Rhode Island presently comes to social studies standards, “*are not intended* to represent the full curriculum for instruction and assessment locally, nor are they meant to simply replace existing social studies curriculum” (emphasis added). Most importantly, they explicitly do *not* attempt to lay out specific history content or sequence.

Since Rhode Island expressly declares its GSEs *not* to be general social studies or history standards, it would be inappropriate to review them as such.

Teachers and local school systems are instead referred to outside standards for aid in developing course content. “Prior to the development of the Civics GSEs,” the website notes, “the *Standards-Based Guide for Social Studies Programs in Rhode Island Schools* was created to aid districts in developing their social studies curriculum [*sic*].” This guide, prepared in 2001, directs readers to various outside resources and seeks to offer conceptual guidance on implementing “standards-based” curricula. “Since no state standards have been adopted for social studies as a whole, districts are encouraged to use the standards listed within the *Standards-Based Guide* to supplement the Civics GSEs when developing curriculum for areas that the Civics GSEs do not cover (e.g., history, economics, psychology, geography).”

DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

N/A

# SOUTH CAROLINA • U.S. HISTORY



GRADE

**A**

SCORES

Content and Rigor 7/7  
Clarity and Specificity 3/3

TOTAL SCORE

**10/10**

## Overview

South Carolina has supplemented its already solid U.S. history standards with extraordinary, narrative “curriculum support” documents. The support texts not only outline what should be covered, but also explain the actual history in depth, maintaining a nuanced, sophisticated, and balanced approach throughout. The result sets a new bar for what states can accomplish: The combined standards and support texts earn the distinction of being the best U.S. history standards in the nation at this time.

## Goals and Organization

South Carolina has adopted a highly unusual two-part structure for its social studies standards.

The *Academic Standards* themselves provide grade-specific outlines for grades K–8, and for four high school courses: global studies, United States history and the Constitution, economics, and United States government. Each grade or course is provided with a numbered series of thematic/chronological “standards,” each of which is followed by specific “indicators,” or content expectations. Four “strands”—history, geography, political science/government, and economics—are invoked, but content is *not* broken up among them. Instead, relevant strands are noted parenthetically at the end of each indicator. Sample classroom exercises are also offered for selected indicators.

Far more unusual—indeed unique—are the state’s “curriculum support” documents (offered alongside the *Standards* since 2008, though still described on the state website as a draft). These provide a detailed explanatory text for every grade and course and link each to the numbered standards and indicators. A descriptive narrative then lays out the history that “is essential for students to know,” while a subsequent segment discusses supplementary detail that “is not essential for students to know.” Finally, “assessment guidelines” reiterate points and issues that pupils should be able to explain.

Kindergarten through second grade introduce basic concepts of community, personal links to the broader world, change over time, famous Americans, and national symbols. Third grade introduces an overview of South Carolina history; eighth grade returns to that subject in greater depth.

The U.S. history sequence constitutes two full courses. Fourth grade runs from pre-settlement to 1865 with fifth grade continuing from 1865 to the present. The one-year high school course, “United States History and the Constitution,” again covers the full span of U.S. history.

### ✓ DOCUMENTS REVIEWED<sup>1</sup>

#### South Carolina Social Studies Academic Standards, U.S. history segments (2005)

##### Accessed from:

<http://ed.sc.gov/agency/Standards-and-Learning/Academic-Standards/old/cso/standards/ss/documents/ginezsocialstudiesstandards.pdf>

#### South Carolina Academic Standards Curriculum Support: Social Studies, K–12, U.S. history segments (2008)

##### Accessed from:

[http://ed.sc.gov/agency/Standards-and-Learning/Academic-Standards/old/cso/social\\_studies/social.html](http://ed.sc.gov/agency/Standards-and-Learning/Academic-Standards/old/cso/social_studies/social.html)

<sup>1</sup> South Carolina has a set of draft standards, dated 2011, available here: [http://ed.sc.gov/agency/Standards-and-Learning/Academic-Standards/old/cso/social\\_studies/social.html](http://ed.sc.gov/agency/Standards-and-Learning/Academic-Standards/old/cso/social_studies/social.html). Since these standards have not yet been formally adopted, and could likely still undergo substantive changes, they were not included in this review.

## Evaluation

South Carolina’s *Standards* are intelligent and competent. The decision to abandon arbitrary thematic strands—though emphasized in the introductory material—is welcome. The standards, the state declares, are “history-driven and are, for the most part, presented in a chronological sequence,” although theme occasionally trumps chronology.

A balanced, “history-driven” approach is indeed evident from the start. The Kindergarten through second grade materials introduce Native American and minority history without marginalizing unifying national themes. The third-grade state history course is unusually sophisticated for the age level, introducing slavery, the state’s role in the Civil War, and its history of Jim Crow. The eighth-grade recap of South Carolina history is admirably detailed and well-linked to national issues. Again, slavery and segregation are covered with dispassionate accuracy.

In the U.S. history courses, the *Standards’* outlines vary in depth and quality. In the fourth- and fifth-grade courses, the indicators do a solid job of delineating key issues, though the level of detail varies, and thematic arrangement occasionally produces a chronological jumble. A trend toward breadth over detail, unfortunately, becomes most pronounced in the high school outline.

This lack of high school specifics would undermine South Carolina’s standards, if the curriculum support documents did not render the objection entirely moot. In essence, the standards are an organizing outline for the detailed content set forth in these unique support materials.

The support documents build upon each grade’s indicators with a lengthy historical narrative. From the start of fourth grade (explaining European competition over the spice routes, summaries of the activities of major explorers, rival European settlements, and Native American culture/regions), the text is impressively thorough and rigorous: Fourth grade receives sixty-seven pages of supporting text; fifth grade receives seventy-nine pages, and the high school U.S. history course receives 116 pages. More important than length is the historical sophistication and carefully balanced outlook of the explanatory text.

These texts—though clear and manageable for teachers preparing their courses, or for students seeking information—are far too extensive to do justice to in a short review. The fourth- and fifth-grade summaries are already comprehensive, and the high school texts often offer still further depth, with some “not essential” material from the earlier grades now considered “essential.” The emphasis throughout is not on rote facts, but on *contextual comprehension*.

Few if any other states, after discussing the issue of taxation without representation, point out “common misconceptions that should be avoided or corrected,” explaining that “the colonists were not protesting against the taxes because the taxes were too high nor were they attempting to form a new kind of government,” a critical point that few Americans understand today. Likewise, few states explain *why* the newly independent Americans deliberately made the central government so weak under the Articles of Confederation. Similar examples continue throughout all courses at all levels. The text becomes increasingly impressive the more one reads from it.

Even in more recent material—closer to today’s concerns, and thus more susceptible to politicization—South Carolina’s documents not only remain remarkably detailed and specific, but also repeatedly urge teachers and students to avoid simplistic clichés.

In discussing nineteenth-century industrial development, for example, the texts caution teachers “to emphasize the role of government in providing the environment in which entrepreneurs could be successful. It is a common misunderstanding...that American individualism was sufficient to promote America’s emergence as an industrial power in the late 19th century.” The texts are careful to note that it can be debated whether the often ruthless late nineteenth-century business leaders “should be labeled robber barons or captains of industry,” and continue that “it is important for students to understand that unfettered competition led to economic uncertainty and eventually to a public call for government regulation of industry.” After discussing the 1925 Scopes trial, the text calls attention to the debate, then and now, “between social conservatives who advocate conformity to a traditional moral code and liberals who advocate individual rights,” stressing that “students should understand the positions of both conservatives and liberals in the 1920s.”

These examples of nuanced, complex, and balanced history are, it should be stressed, *typical and representative* of the South Carolina support materials.

To be sure, there are occasional gaps and slips. Although the origins of slavery are treated in detail, the text only reveals that “slaves were transported first from the interior of Africa to the slave ships”; it does not reveal *by whom* they were transported. As such, the African role in the slave trade has been ducked. Locke is said to have written *The Social Contract*; he wrote *about* the social contract, but the book of that title was actually written by Rousseau. The nativist “Know-Nothing” party is never mentioned. Andrew Johnson’s impeachment is missing from fifth grade’s otherwise superb overview of Reconstruction (though it does appear in the high school text).

Yet these are mere drops in the bucket against the volume of superior content.

## Content and Rigor Conclusion

South Carolina’s *Standards*, by themselves, are solid, if overly broad. But by fleshing out the standards with the extraordinary narratives of the “curriculum support” documents, the state has achieved an unprecedented level of substantive depth. These documents not only identify key points and facts, but offer sophisticated historical explanation—and do so with remarkable balance. The support documents avoid overloading students by distinguishing between more and less essential material; opinions will of course differ on what is or is not essential, but the decisions made are generally sensible. It might be argued that the fourth- and fifth-grade courses are too in-depth for those age levels (they are actually superior to many high school courses in other states). But anything that students fail to understand will be recapitulated in high school, and there is surely no harm in providing teachers in the early grades with sophisticated guidance. South Carolina’s combined standards and support documents well deserve a seven out of seven for Content and Rigor. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

## Clarity and Specificity Conclusion

South Carolina has set out an ambitious sequence (a two-year U.S. history course in fourth and fifth grades a full additional course in high school, plus detailed coverage of South Carolina history in third and eighth grades)—and it backs up that sequence with support material of comprehensive scope and extraordinary detail. History is stressed over social studies methodology, with unclear thematic strands rejected in favor of a jargon-free, chronology-based curriculum. The two-part system of standards and support documents might seem unwieldy, but the easy-to-follow linkage of the support text with the numbered indicators makes the combination straightforward and user-friendly. It is consistently clear what students are expected to know—and they are held to an impressively high standard. South Carolina has made a huge advance in showing what history standards *can* be. Teachers around the country would be well advised to make use of South Carolina’s extraordinary content. The state’s strong sequence and well-designed documents earn a three out of three for Clarity and Specificity. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

# SOUTH DAKOTA • U.S. HISTORY



GRADE

**D**

SCORES

Content and Rigor **2/7**  
Clarity and Specificity **1/3**

TOTAL SCORE

**3/10**

## Overview

South Dakota promises rigorous and comprehensive historical coverage. In reality, however, its standards deliver gap-ridden and fragmentary content, split arbitrarily among thematic strands and headings with little regard for context, coherence, or chronology.

## Goals and Organization

South Dakota's social studies standards provide grade-specific outlines for grades K–8, each divided into five strands: U.S. history, world history, geography, civics, and economics. Each strand is sub-divided into thematic “indicators.” The two indicators provided for US history, common across all grades, are:

- Analyze U.S. historical eras to determine connections and cause/effect relationships in reference to chronology
- Evaluate the influence/impact of various cultures, philosophies, and religions on the development of the U.S.

The indicators are further divided into chronological or thematic “standards,” each of which is categorized as “analysis,” “application,” “knowledge,” or “comprehension,” and provided with “supporting skills and examples.”

At the end of each strand, the state includes “performance descriptors,” which are rubrics defining student comprehension of the strand's broad grade-specific content at advanced, proficient, and basic levels.

The standards follow the same organization for grades 9–12, except that there the strands are separated into subject-specific “core” courses, which replace grade-level outlines. The “core” course outlines are supplemented with additional “standards” and “supporting skills and examples” for “advanced” courses; these add a small number of further conceptual targets for each course.

Kindergarten through third grade focus on chronological concepts, national symbols, holidays, and famous individuals. Fourth grade introduces South Dakota history within the U.S. history strand.

The U.S. history sequence enters in fifth grade and runs from pre-settlement to 1865. A two-year course is placed in eighth grade and high school, with eighth grade covering from the Revolution to Reconstruction, and high school—the state does not indicate in which grade—Reconstruction to the present.

### DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

**South Dakota Social Studies Content Standards, U.S. history segments (2006)**

**Accessed from:**

<http://www.doe.sd.gov/ContentStandards/index.asp>

## Evaluation

South Dakota claims that its “standards are comprehensive and specific, they are rigorous, and they represent South Dakota’s commitment to excellence.” “The essential core content” that students must master is said to be “stated explicitly” therein.

In reality, South Dakota has made only the faintest attempt to identify and outline the basic facts of American history for teachers and students. And the jargon-laden, thematic social studies setup of its strands and indicators robs what little material there is of historical cohesion, coherence, or context.

In the early grades, students are to learn the usual mélange of chronological concepts, national symbols, famous people, and so forth, yet the examples given of famous individuals offer only jumbled groups that focus heavily on minorities and entirely disregard chronology.

As more specific historical information begins to appear, with fourth grade’s broad survey of South Dakota history, the arbitrary division of content between the two indicators—“historical eras” and “cultures, philosophies and religions”—becomes disruptive to both chronology and logic. The arrival of gold miners, for instance, is mentioned under the first indicator while the gold rush appears as an example in the second. The local history material also emphasizes Native Americans to the near-exclusion of all else.

In fifth grade, which introduces U.S. history before 1865, coverage remains brief, fragmented, and grossly general. Under the historical eras indicator, the standards and examples discuss Native American lifestyles and early European explorers (only Columbus and Cortez are named), before moving to “influential people and key events during the American Revolution.” A handful of individuals and three battles are mentioned; the coming of the Revolution is reduced to “Boston Tea Party, Stamp Act, [and] Sugar Act”—in reverse chronological order. A single standard spans “key changes leading to and resulting from growth and invention in the U.S. between the Revolution and 1865,” while the examples offer brief references to territorial expansion, technological innovations, and “important leaders of the Civil War”—Lincoln, Douglas, Jefferson Davis, and Generals Lee and Grant. (Stephen Douglas, who died in the spring of 1861, was of course important only *before* the Civil War.)

Other content for the grade is arbitrarily split into the cultures indicator. Defying all historical logic, we jump abruptly back to motives for colonial settlement, the political relationship between the colonies and England (merely described as “representative/ monarchy/democracy”) and sectional divisions (“slavery, states rights”). Other relevant events

appear—albeit in passing—in other strands entirely: the French and Indian War and War of 1812 appear in world history; the Declaration of Independence, Constitution, and certain Revolutionary leaders appear under civics; the triangular trade, Louisiana Purchase, gold rush, and Native American removal crop up under economics.

In eighth grade, the thematic organization remains unaltered, and the level of detail improves only slightly; the colonial era, relegated exclusively to fifth grade, is not reviewed again. Under the eras indicator, a few events and leaders of the Revolution are listed, and the Declaration of Independence is mentioned. Westward expansion is given a few words: the examples provided are “Louisiana Purchase, Florida, Oregon, [and] Texas,” along with the “Texas Revolution, Mexican War, Cherokee relocation, [and] Seminole War.” Explanation of reform movements is limited to “women, slavery.” For the roots of the Civil War, examples are confined to “political, geographical, and economic differences,” followed by a few political/military leaders, a handful of battles, the Gettysburg Address, and the Emancipation Proclamation—again out of chronological order. (Stephen Douglas is again listed as one of the “key individuals...in the Civil War.”) Reconstruction is reduced to the “Freedmen’s Bureau, Jim Crow laws” (which appeared *after* Reconstruction), “Carpetbaggers, military districts,” and the rise of the Ku Klux Klan. The cultures indicator once again jumps back, briefly mentioning confederation vs. federalism, loyalists vs. patriots, and Federalists vs. Anti-Federalists, through to Manifest Destiny, conflict with Native Americans (through the Battle of the Little Bighorn and Wounded Knee), abolitionism, inventions, and the cultural impact of the Civil War and Reconstruction. And again, a few decontextualized historical fragments appear under civics (including the Constitutional Convention’s Great Compromise and three-fifths clause, the Northwest Ordinance, and the Bill of Rights). The War of 1812 and sharecropping pop up under economics.

The high school course continues in equally shallow and disjointed fashion. Exceedingly brief standards and a handful of arbitrary examples touch on urbanization, westward expansion, big business, imperialism, Progressivism, World War I, the Great Depression, and so forth, totaling barely more than 300 words from the 1860s to the September 11 attacks. The cultures indicator then jumps back in time, again considering the Native American wars and a smattering of cultural, political, and religious movements. Yet again, isolated historical fragments (Supreme Court decisions, the Monroe Doctrine, the Roosevelt Corollary, the Iran-Contra affair, and others) appear in other strands.

The brief supplemental standards for the “advanced” U.S. history course add no specifics, merely directing students to

“chronicle” urbanization, “critique” the causes and impact of western expansion and U.S. imperialism, “describe” the effects and limits of Progressivism, “explain” the relation between domestic and foreign policy, and “evaluate the significance of interactions between the U.S. government and diverse cultures in relation to cultural preservation versus cultural assimilation.”

Throughout, the vague and insubstantial standards and examples are often phrased in language that is not only historically meaningless but grammatically challenged and all but incomprehensible. What is a fifth grader to make of this: “Identify the reasons that led to the development of colonial America”? What is a high school student to do with this: “Explain the cause-effect relationships and legacy that distinguish significant historical periods from Reconstruction to the present”? Or this: “Relate previously learned information of these time periods to the context of succeeding time periods”?

## Content and Rigor Conclusion

South Dakota’s standards promise “rigorous” coverage of “essential core content.” In reality, while some basic history is occasionally mentioned, overly broad standards and scattered, decontextualized examples, split among strands and thematic indicators, rob the material of historical connection, coherence, or historical logic. A disproportionate amount of space is devoted to Native Americans—an understandable focus in South Dakota, *if* basic U.S. history were covered as well. The colonial period, as in a number of other states, is relegated to fifth grade only—though, with hardly any increase in rigor in later grades, all periods are equally shortchanged. South Dakota’s standards earn two out of seven for Content and Rigor. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

## Clarity and Specificity Conclusion

South Dakota’s jargon-filled *Standards*, with their tables of strands, indicators, examples, performance descriptors, and the like, are confusing and unclear, arbitrarily dividing content among the strands and tossing chronology aside. Despite claims that they are “comprehensive and specific,” the standards offer minimal detail; students, according to the introductory text, are expected to attain a high degree of factual knowledge—yet only isolated specifics are ever laid out. The sequence is flawed as well, failing to recapitulate colonial material after fifth grade. South Dakota promised much, but delivered little. The state’s jumbled and disorganized standards barely earn a one out of three for Clarity and Specificity. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

# TENNESSEE • U.S. HISTORY

GRADE

C

SCORES

Content and Rigor 4/7  
Clarity and Specificity 1/3

TOTAL SCORE

5/10

## Overview

Tennessee’s U.S. history standards provide some useful content, though much remains patchy and broad. But the standards constitute an organizational quicksand, from which the reader is lucky to escape with any content or comprehension intact. Extracting any content at all can become a mind-bending task.

## Goals and Organization

Tennessee’s social studies standards provide grade-specific outlines for grades K–8. Each grade is divided into six strands, or “content standards”: culture; economics; geography; governance and civics; history; and individuals, groups, and interactions.

“Learning expectations” are provided for each strand. In the history strand, these are divided by era and constitute directives to understand broad issues of each era (for example, “Recognize the causes, course, and consequences of the Civil War”).

“Achievements” supply each expectation with more specific content expectations (e.g., “Identify sectional differences that led to the Civil War”). Between them, the expectations and achievements constitute what would commonly be called standards.

Finally, the state provides two categories—“performance indicators state” and “performance indicators teacher”—that outline knowledge/skills that students should be able to demonstrate at progressive levels of sophistication (rated as levels 1 to 3). The “performance indicators state” are evaluated on the basis of state assessments, while “performance indicators teacher” are to be assessed “through teacher observation.” The performance indicators—which are *not* divided by era—are often broadly thematic and trans-historical (e.g., the student is able to “identify conclusions about historical events using primary and secondary sources”). They largely recapitulate concepts raised in the expectations and achievements, but they may also invoke specifics not previously mentioned in the achievements (e.g., the student is able to “recognize the rights that workers fought for in the late 1800’s,” such as “wages, hours, insurance, and working conditions”).

At the high school level, subject-specific courses replace the grade-specific outlines. The U.S. history course is first divided into eras, each supplied with learning expectations sorted thematically among the six strands (e.g., a directive to “Understand how industrial development affected the United States culture” is grouped under culture; “Investigate the effect of big business upon the lives of farmers and wage earners” is grouped under individuals, groups and interactions). The achievements are dropped; instead, more specific content now follows in the state and teacher performance indicators. And these are *not* keyed to the learning expectations, but *are* divided by era. The performance

### ✓ DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

Tennessee Social Studies Curriculum Standards: K–12, U.S. history segments (2006)

Accessed from:

<http://www.tn.gov/education/ci/ss/index.shtml>

indicators now constitute the content standards, and the ranking of performance levels is dropped.

Kindergarten through third grade introduce basic concepts of chronology, national symbols, holidays, and famous individuals.

The U.S. history sequence includes two full two-year courses. The first is for fourth and fifth grades, the former running from pre-settlement to 1861 and the latter from 1850 to the 1970s. The second course begins in eighth grade and runs from pre-settlement to 1877, finishing in high school (grade unspecified) with 1870 to the present.

## Evaluation

Tennessee's history standards are an organizational nightmare. We are told that the Kindergarten through eighth-grade materials, presented in a labyrinth of expectations, achievements, and performance indicators, "should be taught in an integrated manner, not in isolation." But in order to do so, the reader must first digest and disentangle the history strand's content from multiple, frequently overlapping sections—to say nothing of historical content shunted into other strands entirely. The high school course, meanwhile, presents a *different* but still bewildering mass of materials, even though it is meant as a continuation of the eighth grade course. Here, specific content is divided into the performance standards, which are not linked to the separate and broader learning expectations, but are arbitrarily split among the six strands.

Historical coverage starts out with broadly-framed themes and little detail from Kindergarten through third grade. In addition to the usual holidays and national symbols, students are told to study famous persons—yet none are named.

The fourth-grade introduction to U.S. history is broken down into series of familiar overlapping eras derived from common social studies models: "Three Worlds Meet" to 1620; "Colonization and Settlement," 1585–1763; "Revolution and the New Nation," 1754–1820; and "Expansion and Reform," 1801–1861. The final learning expectation for each era addresses Tennessee history. The actual content, when it can be found, touches on some important themes and issues. Nonetheless, the expectations and achievements remain too general. For example, students are simply told to "explain when, where, and why groups of people colonized and settled in the United States" or to "explain the events that contributed to the outbreak of the American Revolution." The Articles of Confederation, the Constitution, the Louisiana Purchase, the War of 1812, and sectionalism are mentioned. But more is

*not* mentioned, including Washington, Jefferson, Hamilton, Jacksonian democracy, or any of the antebellum crises.

Some additional specifics appear in the two performance indicator sections, which are arranged only by performance levels, *not* by era. Reasons for colonization are cited ("religious, economic, [and] individual freedom"), along with basic causes of the American Revolution ("taxation, judicial process, lack of representations [*sic*], [and] quartering of troops") and the later failings of the Articles, such as "no single currency, no judicial branch, no [national] enforcement of laws, [and] small and large states having unequal representation"—the last item presumably a reference to the fact that the thirteen states each had a single vote in Congress, regardless of population.

Discussion of the founding documents appears in the separate civics strand; unfortunately, that strand also promotes the myth of the Iroquois League as a key influence on American constitutionalism. Aspects of colonization, cultural contact, sectionalism, and slavery appear in the culture strand as well as the individuals, groups, and interactions strand, both of which are poorly defined.

Fifth grade resumes the course, continuing from 1850 to the 1970s—with identical format and similar lack of depth. The broad basics are touched upon: Civil War, Reconstruction, industrialization, immigration, and so forth. But the achievements remain shallow; for example, "identify sectional interests that led to the Civil War," or "describe the political and economic events that led to World War II." The performance indicators add names of Civil War figures (Chief Justice Taney is mentioned but Dred Scott is not), basic Progressive issues, and key events of the civil rights era. Once again, other historically related material crops up in separate strands.

Eighth grade begins the second, more advanced American history course. The baffling format remains unchanged, but outlining becomes more thorough and achievements more sophisticated. For instance, students are to "discuss the search for religious, economic and individual freedom in the settlement of the colonies"; "recognize the shift from utilizing indentured servitude to slavery within the colonies due to economic reasons and popular uprisings"; and "explain the events that contributed to the outbreak of the American Revolution such as leaders who resisted imperial policy, the English tax on colonists from the Seven Years War, divergent economic interests, and regional motivations." British and European political influences, colonial representative bodies, the Continental Congress, Shays' Rebellion, and other points are at least mentioned—though the last is misspelled and is placed *after* the Bill of Rights. Nebulous items such as "describe the armed conflict of the Revolutionary War" leave much to be desired.

Matters grow worse: The crucial political events of the 1790s—including Washington’s administration, the party schism, and the election of 1800—are still entirely missing. So is Jacksonian democracy, and antebellum crises are reduced to “identify sectional differences that led to the Civil War.” Only a few related specifics are lumped together in the performance indicators with little regard to chronology or context.

In the high school course, the organization is *different*, but not *better*. The content, however, does continue to improve. Many key issues and events are touched upon, including industrialization, economic disparities, Social Darwinism, and political corruption and reform. But the learning expectations, confusingly divided among the six strands, are often vague. For example, students should “understand the effects of the Civil War and Reconstruction on the United States politics” and “understand the effects of World War II upon American society.” The performance indicators add some reasonable specifics; for instance, the Panama Canal, “the idea of a superior Anglo-Saxon culture,” and “yellow journalism” are listed in relation to American imperialism. Yet there are substantial gaps, including the rise of Southern racial segregation, a key point in the history of Tennessee.

The content that is included is undermined by a structure that disrupts coherence, chronology, and logic. For example, in the “performance indicators state,” a vague entry on the “major events” of World War II appears *between* specific events of the Great Depression and a list of New Deal programs—while brief references to the evolution of New Deal policies and opposition thereto, along with further items on World War II, are shunted into the “performance indicators teacher.”

## Content and Rigor Conclusion

Tennessee’s standards contain the raw material for a basic outline of American history, albeit one that is too broad and riddled with gaps. Unfortunately, the bizarre organization reduces the content to a muddle of decontextualized historical fragments. The full course of American history is covered twice, and there is a noticeable increase in rigor in later grades, outlining more specific and sophisticated concepts and themes. Unfortunately, because the most rigorous content appears only at the high school level, the first half of the course, which appears in grade 8, is shortchanged. On balance, Tennessee manages a four out of seven for Content and Rigor. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

## Clarity and Specificity Conclusion

Tennessee’s sequence is reasonable and straightforward, and course scope has been outlined with some detail—even if the result is quite uneven. Clarity is another matter. The ill-

considered structure makes it difficult for teachers or students both to *extract* the information contained in the standards and to derive a clear sense of what they should teach or learn. The historical substance contained in the document could give teachers some meaningful guidance in structuring their courses, but without better presentation it is more likely to be thrown aside in frustration. Tennessee’s clear sequence, but erratic detail and organizational chaos, earn a one out of three for Clarity and Specificity. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

# TEXAS • U.S. HISTORY



GRADE

**D**

SCORES

Content and Rigor **2/7**  
Clarity and Specificity **1/3**

TOTAL SCORE

**3/10**

## Overview

Texas combines a rigidly thematic and theory-based social studies structure with a politicized distortion of history. The result is both unwieldy and troubling, avoiding clear historical explanation while offering misrepresentations at every turn.

## Goals and Organization

The *Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills* (TEKS) provides grade-specific outlines for social studies for grades K–8. At the high school level, subject-specific course outlines replace the grade-specific outlines. Courses include U.S. History, World History, U.S. Government, and “Economics with Emphasis on the Free Enterprise System and Its Benefits.”

Each grade or course outline includes an introduction, laying out the aims for the year/course, and a “knowledge and skills” section that sets forth the content expectations. The latter section is split among eight strands: history; geography; economics; government; citizenship; culture; science, technology, and society; and social studies skills. For each strand, a numbered series of thematic or chronological headings is given, each in turn provided with more specific “statements” which provide examples for students to “describe,” “explain,” or “analyze.” Some examples are marked as required, others as suggested.

Kindergarten through third grade focus on concepts of self, family, community, citizenship, and chronology. Fourth grade introduces Texas history, which is reprised in seventh grade.

The U.S. history sequence begins in fifth grade with a full overview of American history. A second U.S. history course begins in eighth grade and covers pre-settlement to 1877; the course concludes in high school, running from 1877 to the present.

## Evaluation

Texas’s heavily politicized 2010 revisions to its social studies curriculum have attracted massive national attention. Indeed, both in public hearings and press interviews, the leaders of the State Board of Education made no secret of their evangelical Christian-right agenda, promising to inculcate biblical principles, patriotic values, and American exceptionalism. And politics do figure heavily in the resulting TEKS.

But the problems begin with the very structure of the document, an unwieldy tangle of social studies categories and arbitrary thematic subdivisions. Even the outlines for the subject-specific high school courses are divided among *all* the various strands. In other words, the history course includes government, geography, and economics sections—yet those subjects also receive their own separate courses, which then include their *own*

### ✓ DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

**Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills: Social Studies, U.S. history segments (2010)**

**Accessed from:**

<http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/rules/tac/chapter113/index.html>

**Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills: Economics with Emphasis on the Free Enterprise System and its Benefits, U.S. history segments (2010)**

**Accessed from:**

<http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/rules/tac/chapter118/index.html>

history, government, and economics strands. Unfortunately, while the state directs teachers to “integrate” the content from all strands “for instructional purposes,” it gives no guidance on *how* to reassemble this jigsaw puzzle for effective classroom use.

While such social studies doctrine is usually associated with the relativist and diversity-obsessed educational left, the right-dominated Texas Board of Education made no effort to replace traditional social studies dogma with substantive historical content. Instead, it seems to have grafted on its own conservative talking points. The lists of “historically significant” names, for example, incorporate all the familiar politically correct group categories (women and minorities are systematically included in all such lists, regardless of their relative historical significance). At the same time, however, the document distorts or suppresses less triumphal or more nuanced aspects of our past that the Board found politically unacceptable (slavery and segregation are all but ignored, while religious influences are grossly exaggerated). The resulting fusion is a confusing, unteachable hodgepodge, blending the worst of two educational dogmas.

Complex historical issues are obscured with blatant politicizing throughout the document. Biblical influences on America’s founding are exaggerated, if not invented. The complicated but undeniable history of separation between church and state is flatly dismissed. From the earliest grades, students are pressed to uncritically celebrate the “free enterprise system and its benefits.” “Minimal government intrusion” is hailed as key to the early nineteenth-century commercial boom—ignoring the critical role of the state and federal governments in internal improvements and economic expansion. Native peoples are missing until brief references to nineteenth-century events. Slavery, too, is largely missing. Sectionalism and states’ rights are listed *before* slavery as causes of the Civil War, while the issue of slavery in the territories—the actual trigger for the sectional crisis—is never mentioned at all. During and after Reconstruction, there is no mention of the Black Codes, the Ku Klux Klan, or sharecropping; the term “Jim Crow” never appears. Incredibly, racial segregation is only mentioned in a passing reference to the 1948 integration of the armed forces.

In the modern era, the standards list “the internment of German, Italian and Japanese Americans and Executive Order 9066”—exaggerating the comparatively trivial internment of German and Italian Americans, and thereby obscuring the incontrovertible racial dimension of the larger and more systematic Japanese American internment. It is disingenuously suggested that the House Un-American Activities Committee—and, by extension, McCarthyism—have been vindicated by the Venona decrypts of Soviet espionage activities (which had, in reality, no link to McCarthy’s targets). Opposition to

the civil rights movement is falsely identified only with “the congressional bloc of Southern Democrats”—whose later metamorphosis into Southern Republicans is never mentioned. Specific right-wing policy positions are inculcated as well. For example, students are explicitly urged to condemn federal entitlement programs, including Texas-born Lyndon Johnson’s “Great Society,” and to mistrust international treaties (considered threats to American sovereignty).

The strange fusion of conventional left-wing education theory and right-wing politics undermines content from the start. Early grades focus on conventional social studies categories: community and citizenship, chronology, and geography, gradually introducing local and national symbols along with carefully diverse lists of notable historical figures. Yet discussion of government services pointedly celebrates the “U.S. free enterprise system.”

Beginning in fifth grade, the fragmented content outline seems mainly focused on *telling* students which broad swaths of U.S. history they should know, rather than *explaining* anything, or even listing key people, issues, and events in detail. Instead, teachers and students are given an arbitrary and frequently tendentious laundry list of required and recommended examples, with little cohesion or coherence.

Under the history strand, fifth graders are first told to understand “the causes and effects of European colonization.” (Native peoples, surely relevant here, are skipped.) “The accomplishments of significant individuals” are mentioned—but those listed are William Bradford, Anne Hutchinson, William Penn, John Smith, John Wise, and Roger Williams, an extremely limited and arbitrary selection. Students are told to understand the reasons for independence; however, the sole examples given are the French and Indian War and Boston Tea Party, along with a few names and vague reference to their “motivations and contributions.”

Similar items briefly mention the Articles of Confederation and Constitution, the “political, economic, and social changes that occurred in the United States during the 19<sup>th</sup> century” (a sub-heading mentions the Civil War and Reconstruction), and “important issues, events, and individuals” in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Here, a short list of examples bizarrely gives “the oil and gas industries” equal prominence with industrialization, urbanization, the Great Depression, the two world wars, and the civil rights movement. A truncated, historically incoherent, and diversity-driven list of key individuals includes Jane Addams, Eisenhower, Martin Luther King, Jr., Rosa Parks, Franklin Roosevelt, Reagan, Colin Powell, and the Tuskegee Airmen.

Related items are also split off into the various other strands. Under economics, there is mention of colonial industries, without examples, and an anachronistic reference to the rise of the “free enterprise system.” Under government, the Mayflower Compact and Virginia House of Burgesses abruptly appear without context, along with the Declaration of Independence and a few specifics about the Constitution.

The main two-year U.S. history course begins in eighth grade. Though the headings are better focused and more examples are given, the flaws evident in fifth grade still dominate; students are directed to understand broad periods or themes, aided only by decontextualized and random examples. This time, for example, “the growth of representative government” in the colonies is mentioned, followed by a short list of unexplained documents and institutions—and a strikingly tendentious directive to “describe how religion and virtue” underpinned representative government. Similar lists address the causes and leaders of the American Revolution and its aftermath, followed by extremely general points on the 1790s and the early nineteenth century (almost wholly devoid of specifics). These hopscotch to the War of 1812, the Monroe Doctrine, and Jackson and the Cherokee removal, before jumping *back* to the Northwest Ordinance, then on to Manifest Destiny, the Mexican War, sectionalism, tariffs, the Civil War, and Reconstruction. Slavery, so central to the history of Texas, is mentioned only in passing. And then, of course, the other seven strands “cover” the same period yet again.

In the high school U.S. history course, the pattern is the same. Scattered examples and lists of names quickly move through late nineteenth-century politics, the emergence of the United States as a world power, Progressivism, and the 1920s; on to the civil rights movement, the Reagan era, 9/11 and beyond. Once again, the other strands revisit the same ground from different perspectives, adding more isolated factoids and ill-matched lists of names. Then, the government and economics courses (themselves subdivided into the usual strands) “cover” the subject yet again, each strand and course offering further fragments of material in a historically incomprehensible jumble.

## Content and Rigor Conclusion

Texas has constructed a bizarre amalgam of traditionally ahistorical social studies—combining the usual inclusive, diversity-driven checklists with a string of politically and religiously motivated historical distortions. It is particularly ironic that the aggressively right-tilting Texas Board of Education embraced the mindset and methodology of social studies, traditionally the tool of a left-leaning educational establishment. The result is the worst of both worlds. Rigor

is difficult to assess, for coherent content outlines are not provided; teachers only get bald references to events and lists of names, split among confusing strands and courses. The only real difference at higher grade levels is that there are somewhat more examples, specific events, and time spans. Most disturbingly, history is distorted throughout the document in the interest of political talking points. Texas’s patchy and distorted content receives a two out of seven for Content and Rigor. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

## Clarity and Specificity Conclusion

The TEKS sequence is quite clear: U.S. history is introduced in fifth grade, and a two-year course is offered in eighth grade and high school. But scope is another matter entirely. Teachers are merely directed to include listed items without context or explanation. The TEKS create no usable framework for teachers: How can such selective, fragmentary, and historically vapid checklists help instructors to design a course? A popular Lone Star State slogan proclaims “Texas: It’s like a whole other country”—but Texas’s standards are a disservice both to its own teachers and students and to the larger national history of which it remains a part. The state deserves only a one out of three for Clarity and Specificity. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

# UTAH • U.S. HISTORY

GRADE

C

SCORES

Content and Rigor 4/7  
Clarity and Specificity 2/3

TOTAL SCORE

6/10

## Overview

Utah offers straightforward outlines of U.S. history content, largely unencumbered by abstract or theoretical social studies categories. Unfortunately, the outlines are often rudimentary, specifics are often neglected, chronology is not always respected, and some outright errors appear.

## Goals and Organization

Utah provides grade-specific standards for grades K–6, and standards for subject-specific courses assigned to grades 7–12. Each grade or course is divided into a series of thematic/chronological “standards,” each of which is sub-divided into more specific content headings, called “objectives.” The objectives are in turn supplied with grade- or course-specific content expectations, called “indicators.”

Basic concepts of community, chronology, connection to the past, diversity, national symbols, and holidays are introduced from Kindergarten through third grade. Fourth grade introduces “Utah Studies.”

Fifth grade offers an introductory U.S. history course, running from pre-settlement through the late twentieth century. A second, two-year course begins in eighth grade, which runs from pre-settlement to 1877; the second half, to be placed anywhere in grades ten through twelve, reviews earlier periods and then continues from post-Reconstruction to the present.

## Evaluation

The Utah standards emphasize “coordinated and systematic study” of history and other social studies areas, stressing both analytical skills and a “knowledge base.” The aim is “an authentic, active, integrated, meaningful, and in depth social studies curriculum,” resulting in “geographic, historical, economic, civic, social and cultural literacy.”

The question is whether the Utah curriculum in U.S. history measures up to these claims.

In the early grades, the thematic standards correspond to familiar social studies strands: civics, economics, geography, and so forth. Equally familiar basic concepts are introduced, though Utah places somewhat greater emphasis than usual on inculcating “patriotic” attitudes. The fourth grade “Utah Studies” course is a largely non-historical overview of culture and landscape.

Starting with the fifth grade U.S. history course, the strands are dropped and the standards divide the course into eras, starting with pre-settlement. The grade’s introductory text notes that, while “there is much more content in studying [sic] the United States than

### ✓ DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

**Utah K–12 Core Curriculum: Social Studies, grades K–2, U.S. history segments (2009)**

**Accessed from:**

[http://www.schools.utah.gov/curr/socialstudies/documents/BoardapprovedK-2TomSutton2\\_000.pdf](http://www.schools.utah.gov/curr/socialstudies/documents/BoardapprovedK-2TomSutton2_000.pdf)

**Utah K–12 Core Curriculum: Social Studies, grades 3–6, U.S. history segments (2008)**

**Accessed from:**

<http://www.schools.utah.gov/curr/core/corepdf/SoSt3-6.pdf>

**Utah K–12 Core Curriculum: Social Studies, grades 7–12, U.S. history segments (2002)**

**Accessed from:**

<http://www.schools.utah.gov/curr/core/corepdf/SoSt7-12.pdf>

can be covered in a year, there are essential aspects students should learn.” The outline that follows does indeed aim for breadth over detail, offering little historical explanation. But, at the same time, it lays out many essential themes and issues, beginning with the technology and motives of European exploration, regions of colonial settlement, and contact with Native Americans. Basic content items continue through colonial trade, the roots of representative government, the American Revolution, the establishment of new governments, and the Constitution. Some important points appear: “the beginning and expansion of the slave trade” is, for instance, included under the heading on colonial economics. But details frequently remain skimpy. The French and Indian War, the Stamp Act, and the Boston Tea Party are the only examples given to explain the Revolutionary crisis, alongside general references to loyalist vs. patriot attitudes, the Declaration of Independence, and unnamed Revolutionary leaders. There are also some politicized distortions: As in too many other states, the Iroquois League is prominently listed as a key influence on colonial representative government and on the federal Constitution—a popular and politically correct yet historically groundless idea.

Specifics fade after the Constitution. A brief section mentions westward expansion in the early nineteenth century, tossing together the “Louisiana Purchase, Lewis and Clark expedition, treaties with American Indians, Homestead Act, Trail of Tears, [and] California Gold Rush”—out of chronological sequence—and the “Oregon, Mormon, Spanish, [and] California” trails. It then jumps to a quick discussion of sectionalism, a few points on the Civil War itself, industrialization, immigration, World War I, the Great Depression, World War II, and post-war social change. This curriculum is simply too vague and general to be useful at any grade level.

American history returns in eighth grade, the first half of a two-year course. There is a notable improvement in depth, but historical coverage remains uneven. The causes of exploration and colonization are now explored in greater detail, as are the origins of slavery and the “destruction of American Indian cultures.” More examples are given for early settlement regions and leaders; imperial rivalries over North America are mentioned. Although specifics are still patchy, key issues of the Revolutionary period are outlined with greater sophistication. Some leaders and political groups are listed, and the terms of the Treaty of Paris and the flaws of the Articles of Confederation are touched upon. Yet again, when the “foundation” of the Constitution is discussed, the examples are: “Magna Carta, Iroquois Confederation, [and] European philosophers.” The state constitutions—which were the most important Constitutional influences—are absent. Another error follows immediately: “Constitution ratification compromises” lists “3/5

Compromise, Great Compromise, [and the] Bill of Rights”—yet only the last of these emerged from the ratification debates; the first two compromises were reached at the Constitutional Convention in 1787.

Discussion of the Constitutional system segues directly to Manifest Destiny and westward expansion, skipping the Washington administration, party schism, and election of 1800. The War of 1812, Texas independence, Mexican War, technology, and industrialization are mentioned, but political history is largely absent. A single item on “new political parties throughout the 18th and 19th centuries; e.g., Whigs, Jacksonian Democrats, [and] Republicans” does no justice to the subject, tossing together parties from very different eras facing very different issues, all without explanation. The rise of Supreme Court power is mentioned, but judicial review and specific cases are not. Reform movements are discussed in some detail, but sectionalism is given no specifics prior to the Compromise of 1850. The course closes on a better note: The coverage of the 1850s, Civil War, and Reconstruction, though general, touches on more key issues before moving into post-war western expansion.

The second part of the U.S. history course (to be offered anywhere in grades ten through twelve) first briefly recaps colonial settlement, antebellum expansion, Civil War and Reconstruction, and Native American policy. As the course moves on into the late nineteenth century, detail remains selective and thematic headings often compromise chronology. The era is discussed largely in terms of industrialization, big business, labor, and urbanization. Political history is all but ignored, save for a catch-all mention of “the growth and influence of political machines; i.e., muckrakers [and] Progressives”—neither of which *were* “political machines”—and a passing reference to socialism. Imperialism and World War I are touched on, but the latter mainly focuses on Wilson’s post-war efforts to ratify the Versailles Treaty. Social changes in the 1920s are discussed; again, the politics of the period are not. The centralization of government power in the New Deal is discussed—but a directive to “analyze the major causes of the Great Depression” explains nothing. Fascism is mentioned as a cause of World War II (many states skip over it), and the war itself receives some detail. But thematic units on the post-war world, while offering reasonable specifics, muddle its chronology. All post-war American involvements in Asia are mentioned together, regardless of when they occurred. McCarthyism and Watergate appear together under a general heading on domestic developments—*after* the Great Society, and *before* the space race. The civil rights movement is discussed only thematically, followed by the “counter culture” movement and a closing item that lumps together “the ‘Reagan Revolution,’” environmentalism, and global terrorism.

## Content and Rigor Conclusion

Utah's history standards do not live up to their self-confident introductory billing. They offer a basic outline of American history which will give teachers some guidance in structuring their courses. But they display serious gaps in coverage and much of what is covered is treated too broadly. Even within the largely chronological outlines, thematic groupings of content sometimes undermine historical logic. There are also outright errors. Rigor at the fifth-grade level could certainly be improved: Though it aims to cover the entirety of American history in one year and must necessarily treat matters briefly, educators need specifics in order to teach effectively. The level of rigor in eighth grade and high school is notably higher but still uneven, and gaps, lack of specifics, and errors continue. Utah's outlines receive a four out of seven for Content and Rigor. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

## Clarity and Specificity Conclusion

The Utah standards are largely free of jargon, and avoid splitting history content among arbitrary strands. The sequence is straightforward, with each grade or course clearly assigned content that develops in complexity over time. The system of nested standards, objectives, and indicators creates a routine outline format that is easy to follow. The major failing is in detail. Students and teachers are not given a sufficiently comprehensive overview of course content—what they are expected to learn and to teach is set out in overly general terms. Utah offers a usable overview of American history, but it needs greater consistency, depth, detail, and explanation. It earns a two out of three for Clarity and Specificity. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

# VERMONT • U.S. HISTORY



GRADE

**F**

SCORES

Content and Rigor 1/7  
Clarity and Specificity 0/3

TOTAL SCORE

**1/10**

## Overview

Vermont's history standards mention (in passing) that American history happened, and direct students to analyze it. Beyond that, they provide nothing but conceptual generalizations and theoretical abstractions, all concealed within a jargon-ridden maze of strands, grade expectations, thematic headings, and sub-headings.

## Goals and Organization

Vermont's "History and Social Science Standards," part of the state's larger *Framework of Standards*, is divided into eight strands: investigation and critical evaluation; history; geography; citizenship; diversity and unity; economics; conflicts and conflict resolution; and identity and interdependence. Each strand is further broken into numbered thematic headings, and each of these is supplied with "evidence" items, constituting specific content expectations, for each of three grade blocks: pre-K–4, 5–8 and 9–12.

The history strand is split among three thematic headings: historical connections, traditional and social histories, and being a historian. The historical connections heading is further divided into the following sections: Vermont, United States, and world. Starting in fifth grade, these sections are further divided into eras.

The separate history and social science *Grade Expectations* lay out further analytical and interpretive exercises, divided among five strands: inquiry; history; physical and cultural geography; civics, government, and society; and economics. The history strand, meant to complement the history strand in the *Framework*, is organized under three sentence starters: "Students connect the past with the present by..." is the first; "students show understanding of how humans interpret history by..." is the second; and "students show understanding of past, present and future time by..." is the third. Specific exercises then complete the sentences, laying out exercises for two-year grade bands from pre-Kindergarten to eighth grade, and for a four-year high school grade block. (For instance, in grades nine through twelve, "Students connect the past with the present by hypothesizing how critical events could have had different outcomes.") These broad exercises may or may not refer to specific historical examples. The *Grade Expectations* use narrower grade bands than the *Frameworks*; but they do not offer specific content outlines or further define what content is assigned to what grade.

From pre-Kindergarten through fourth grade the Vermont standards introduce basic concepts of democracy, famous individuals, national symbols, and holidays.

The materials geared toward fifth through eighth grades are supposed to cover U.S. history from pre-settlement to 1890, and the high school grades from 1850 to the present.

## ✓ DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

**Vermont's Framework of Standards and Learning Opportunities, U.S. history segments (2000)**

**Accessed from:**

<http://education.vermont.gov/new/pdfdoc/pubs/framework.pdf>

**Grade Expectations for Vermont's Framework of Standards and Learning Opportunities: History and Social Science, U.S. history segments (2004)**

**Accessed from:**

[http://education.vermont.gov/new/pdfdoc/pubs/grade\\_expectations/rtf\\_doc\\_files/history\\_social\\_sciences.doc](http://education.vermont.gov/new/pdfdoc/pubs/grade_expectations/rtf_doc_files/history_social_sciences.doc)

## Evaluation

The Vermont standards claim to be committed to clarifying the “essential knowledge” that “students should *know*,” as well as teaching them how to provide “evidence to back up assertions.” The analytical exercises in the supplemental *Grade Expectations* are intended to be “a valuable resource for teachers and schools as they implement the Vermont Framework,” focusing “on depth of understanding” and “identifying key knowledge.”

Sadly, this commitment is little more than empty rhetoric. Vermont’s standards actually focus almost entirely on broad concepts, abstractions, and trans-historical (or ahistorical) themes and skills with little reference to specific periods or events. Worse, what little content does appear is buried deep in the nested strands, headings, and sub-headings.

In the grade band covering pre-Kindergarten through fourth grade, evidence items under the United States heading mention democratic values, along with related people (such as “Washington, Lincoln, [and] King”), events (e.g., “4th of July, Memorial Day, [and] Labor Day”), and symbols (“flags, eagles”). A passing reference to regional folklore and cultures, without examples, along with a brief reference to the founding documents under the civics strand, completes U.S. history coverage for the entire grade band.

In fifth through eighth grade, a series of chronological headings cover the following: “Native Cultures to 1600,” “Colonization (1500–1774),” “The Revolutionary/New State Era (1775–1791),” and “Expansion (1791–1890).” However, just five evidence items are offered for *all four periods combined*. Students are to “examine two or more native cultures,” noting their “similarities and differences.” They are to “trace the evolution of political, religious, economic and social institutions in the American colonies.” For the Revolutionary era, they are to “investigate the political, social and economic causes of the American Revolution” and to evaluate the “ideas and institutions” of the founding documents. Finally, for the *entire* period from 1791 to 1890, they are to “investigate and analyze the conditions that led to territorial expansion, effects on various groups, and concepts of nationalism and sectionalism.” (“The phrase various groups,” we are helpfully told in the introduction, “includes racial, ethnic, and gender groups, and various socioeconomic classes.”) That is Vermont’s complete U.S. history outline through eighth grade.

In the high school grades, further chronological headings run from 1850 to the present. There is no noteworthy improvement in rigor; six evidence items are given this time instead of five. The closest Vermont comes to *any* specific historical information is the directive to analyze “major forces” shaping America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries,

for which a few examples are given: “industrialization, urbanization, immigration, imperialism, nationalism, unionism, and the struggle for equal rights.” Otherwise, students are simply to “investigate the social, political, and economic causes and effects of the Civil War,” “analyze causes and effects of WW I and the US role in the world,” “analyze causes and effects of the Great Depression and identify policies designed to fix it,” analyze “causes and effects of WW II,” and “analyze the domestic issues facing the US in post WW II as well as foreign policy issues.”

The other headings within the history strand—“traditional and social histories” and “being a historian”—are brief and abstract. High school students are supposed to “identify and analyze the influence of various groups...on major issues and events under study,” and to “explain why we study human actions in the past.” Scattered historical references also appear in other strands within the “History and Social Science Standards.” For example, under “conflicts and conflict resolution,” students are to “explain a conflict (e.g. Labor Issues, Revolutionary War) by recognizing the interests, values, perspectives, and points of view of those directly and indirectly involved in the conflict.” But nothing historically coherent or useful is provided.

The history strand of the separate *Grade Expectations*—which uses different grade ranges than the *Frameworks*—adds only vague theoretical exercises, making occasional reference to disconnected historical facts. Fifth and sixth graders, for instance, are to consider how and why “life in the United States and/or the world has both changed and stayed the same over time,” such as how “the life of a teenager during the American Revolution” would compare to today. Seventh and eighth graders are to evaluate “the credibility of differing accounts of the same event(s),” such as “the Revolutionary War from a colonist’s perspective vs. British perspective” or “the bombing of Hiroshima from the perspective of a Japanese citizen vs. an American soldier.” High school students are to explain “historical origins of key ideas and concepts (e.g., Enlightenment, Manifest Destiny, [and] religious and governmental philosophies) and how they are reinterpreted over time.” Again, there is no historical outline, just fragments in a theoretical frame.

## Content and Rigor Conclusion

Beyond listing broad eras and mentioning a few landmarks in the American past, Vermont’s standards contain no U.S. history content whatsoever. Their concern is that students “think about” history by following an arbitrary series of theoretical categories—with special reference to marginalized “groups”—all to enrich student personal experience. Rigor

does not increase across grades, for it is absent from all of them. If Vermont students *have* any substantive historical knowledge to analyze, it will be thanks solely to the efforts of their teachers, who receive no meaningful guidance from the *Framework* or the *Grade Expectations*. Vermont's few bare references to historical content earn it a marginal one out of seven for Content and Rigor. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

## Clarity and Specificity Conclusion

The Vermont *Framework* lays out the most basic sequence for U.S. history. It is clear from the distributions of the brief historical outlines that the period to 1890 is to be covered in grades five through eight, while 1850 to the present is to be covered in high school. But the total lack of detail—and the fragmentation of even theoretical content items into strands, headings, sub-headings, and so on—gives no indication of what is to be taught or when, much less any measurable standard of what students are to know and when. The *Grade Expectations* refer to narrower two-grade spans; but since they address no specific content at any grade level, they add nothing to the sequence or to course specifics. Despite the “History and Social Science” label, history is scarcely found. Vermont's confusing maze, with little of substance concealed within it, merits no points at all for Clarity and Specificity. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

# VIRGINIA • U.S. HISTORY



GRADE

C

SCORES

Content and Rigor 5/7  
Clarity and Specificity 1/3

TOTAL SCORE

6/10

## Overview

Virginia's U.S. history standards contain much solid content. Unfortunately, their uneven depth, omissions, politicized emphases, and poor organization all compromise their quality and usefulness. The failure to assign specific content to particular grade levels further undermines the history curriculum.

## Goals and Organization

Virginia's standards offer grade-specific course outlines for grades K–3. Content in these grades is broken among four strands: history, geography, economics, and civics. After third grade, the standards “do not prescribe the grade level at which the standards must be taught or a scope and sequence within a grade level,” but are instead split into subject-specific courses, to be offered at whatever level “local divisions” feel “best serves their students.” Courses in history, after introductory units on geography and social studies skills, follow a mainly chronological structure, with a straightforward outline of numbered standards laying out course-specific content expectations.

The *Standards*, in turn, are supplemented by the *Curriculum Frameworks*, which expand upon each numbered standard with “essential understandings” (an overarching concept summarizing the material’s import), “essential questions” (analytical queries about the material), “essential knowledge” (additional specifics and factual details), and “essential skills” (analytic skills).

Kindergarten through third grade introduce basic concepts of chronology, national symbols, holidays, and famous people. Second grade focuses on Native Americans. Third grade emphasizes early European explorers and Native American contact.

Following the early elementary grades, subject-specific courses are outlined, assigned to no particular grade or age level. Those relevant to U.S. history are “Virginia Studies,” “U.S. History to 1865,” “U.S. History from 1865 to the Present,” and “Virginia and United States History.”

## Evaluation

“History,” the Virginia Standards of Learning assert, “should be the integrative core of the curriculum,” in which the humanities and the social sciences “come to life.” In order to achieve this goal, however, Virginia needs to improve its inconsistent content and lack of chronological focus. The organization is also poor, with content awkwardly divided among the standards and the curriculum frameworks. A tendency toward tendentious politicization is pervasive throughout.

### DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

**History and Social Science Standards of Learning for Virginia Public Schools, U.S. history segments (2008)**

**Accessed from:**

[http://www.doe.virginia.gov/testing/sol/standards\\_docs/history\\_socialscience/next\\_version/stds\\_all\\_history.pdf](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/testing/sol/standards_docs/history_socialscience/next_version/stds_all_history.pdf)

**Virginia History and Social Science Standards of Learning Curriculum Frameworks, U.S. history segments (2008)**

**Accessed from:**

[http://www.doe.virginia.gov/testing/sol/standards\\_docs/history\\_socialscience/index.shtml](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/testing/sol/standards_docs/history_socialscience/index.shtml)

The early grades introduce conventional basic concepts, but devote arguably disproportionate space to Native American history. They also take care to note the culture, government, and trade of the medieval African Kingdom of Mali, but the fact that the kingdom's wealth derived largely from slavery and the slave trade are *not* mentioned. The Virginia Studies course, presumably intended for later elementary grades, does include a brief but reasonable outline of the state's "rich history."

The *Standards'* outline for "United States history to 1865," which declares that it's meant to impart the "ideas and events that strengthened the union," instead reveals a politicized emphasis. Native Americans are again given disproportionate space and contrasted with Europeans in a biased manner, "with emphasis on the American Indian concept of land." Nothing is said about the rise of representative government in the colonies, and especially the crucial role of Virginia, leaving the next unit—extremely general directives to explain "issues of dissatisfaction" and "political ideas" leading to the Revolution—oddly rootless. After general items on the Articles of Confederation, the Constitution, and "the first five presidents" (neglecting to mention that four of the five were Virginians) the outline jumps to a brief segment on westward expansion before moving on to an equally brief unit on the Civil War. Therein, students are to explain "cultural, economic, and constitutional issues that divided the nation" and how "states' rights and slavery increased sectional tensions"—but no specific events are mentioned.

Much of the detail absent from the standards is meant to be provided in the *Curriculum Framework*. Unfortunately, this document is seriously flawed. Three of its four sections—the essential understandings, essential questions, and essential skills—are entirely general. Only the essential knowledge items add some specifics, and they do so with inconsistent quality. The *Framework* for the first U.S. history course helpfully fleshes out motives and background for European explorers. Discussion of West Africa mentions the exchange of European goods for gold, but it does *not* mention the African role in the slave trade. The reasons for various colonial settlements are sketched adequately, as are regional economic differences. But the rise of representative government is *still* left out, undermining an otherwise fairly sound discussion of Revolutionary grievances.

The *Standards'* brief reference to the first five presidents is poorly fleshed out: Of three items devoted to Washington (which omit his decisive contribution to legitimizing the fledgling national government), the third is largely devoted to the role of Benjamin Banneker, an African American, in laying out the District of Columbia—hardly the defining event of the period. The one item for John Adams—stating that "a two-party system emerged during his administration"—is simply

wrong: The two-party system had emerged much earlier, hence the contested and very close 1796 election. The items that follow add some further content, but, since they follow the brief and thematic structure of the "standards," they have little sense of chronological, historical development.

The *Standards'* outline for the 1865–present course opens with brief reference to the Reconstruction amendments and Reconstruction's impact, followed by short references to westward expansion and its impact on Native Americans, Jim Crow, big business, and Progressivism. Similarly shallow items continue through World War II, with an exceedingly brief final unit on the post-war period. In an odd contrast to the earlier political predisposition, now students are asked to identify "the role of America's military and veterans in defending freedom during the Cold War"—an equally biased directive (if skewed in the opposite direction).

The *Framework* adds some detail but again does so inconsistently. Reconstruction is explained reasonably well, as are later nineteenth-century social and economic changes. But political history is still largely absent and there is little chronological grounding. Handling of the 1920s, the New Deal, and World War II are generally sound. The post-war period, however, is chronologically jumbled and patchy: McCarthyism, for example, is missing.

The high school course on Virginia and United States history is oddly titled, since it hardly focuses on Virginia. This course is meant to explicate "the historical development of American ideas and institutions from the Age of Exploration to the present," with a focus "on political and economic history." The result overlaps awkwardly with the main U.S. history courses, supplying some of the political history missing therein—though separated from broader context—while re-treading some of the same ground. But it by no means closes all the gaps. How "values and institutions of European economic and political life took root in the colonies" is mentioned, and contrasted with the rise and impact of slavery. But representative government is *still* not specifically covered. The unit on the American Revolution offers Locke and *Common Sense*, but otherwise remains non-specific. Washington and Madison are mentioned, as is the Marshall Court, but the election of 1800 is missing; the War of 1812 and Jacksonian democracy are included but the Mexican War and acts governing slavery in the territories are not. This erratic pattern continues on into the modern era.

The *Curriculum Framework* for "Virginia and U.S. History" adds more substance—briefly including, at last, the rise of representative government in the colonies. The materials expand upon Locke and *Common Sense*, but not other Revolutionary ideas. Matters improve with the Constitutional

Convention, the Marshall Court (out of historical sequence), the party schism, and the election of 1800. The Mexican War finally appears, before jumping back to the War of 1812. Key events of the sectional crisis are finally mentioned but are chronologically jumbled. There is a dramatic improvement in the coverage of the political issues of the Civil War and Reconstruction, with significantly more detail and explanation offered, as well as a more solid chronological structure. If Virginia's standards were consistently on the level of this section, they would be formidable.

### Content and Rigor Conclusion

Although it is not necessarily obvious at first glance, the Virginia standards contain a good deal of historical material, some of it of quite high quality. Unfortunately, depth and rigor are uneven. Explanatory material is split up over multiple documents; the division of related content into semi-overlapping courses means that students will encounter integral aspects of the same material in different courses and grades. Grade-level appropriateness is impossible to judge, since the subject courses may be placed anywhere from fourth to twelfth grades. Political bias is also frequently evident. It is particularly disappointing that Virginia, the most important state in the founding of our constitutional system and a state justifiably proud of its rich history, earns only a five out of seven for Content and Rigor. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

### Clarity and Specificity Conclusion

Poor organization seriously undermines Virginia's U.S. history standards. The division between standards and supporting frameworks could be workable—if the standards were sufficiently specific to allow clear organization of the supporting information. Sequence is not specified, since all grade-level decisions are left to local districts. Detail, once extracted from the confusion of documents and courses, is generally adequate; at times, it is even quite strong. But the strange splitting of U.S. history between the main sequence and the more politically focused "Virginia and U.S. History" course disrupts the coherence and cohesion of the content and undermines the scope and logic of each course. Virginia's confusing organization earns just one out of three for Clarity and Specificity. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

# WASHINGTON • U.S. HISTORY



GRADE

**D**

SCORES

Content and Rigor **2/7**  
Clarity and Specificity **1/3**

TOTAL SCORE

**3/10**

## Overview

Washington’s U.S. history standards present both meager and broad historical examples splintered among arbitrary strands and thematic headings; what little history the state provides urges politicized condemnation rather than comprehension or analysis. All final decisions on scope and content are left to local teachers and districts, supposedly to address their students’ “particular interests and needs.”

## Goals and Organization

Washington’s standards provide grade-specific outlines for grades K–12, although districts are free to “reorder” the material “within grade bands (i.e., 3–5, 6–8, and 9–12).”

Each grade is divided among five strands, called Essential Academic Learning Requirements (EALRs): civics, economics, geography, history, and social studies skills. Each strand is then divided into a fixed set of thematic headings, or “components.” The history strand has four such components at all grade levels: historical chronology; causal factors that have shaped major events in history; multiple perspectives and interpretations of historical events; and using history to understand the present and plan for the future. Components are supplied in turn with grade-level expectations for which the state provides suggested examples; together, the grade-level expectations and examples comprise the grade-specific content expectations.

Each grade-level expectation, thematically arranged under the strands and components, is also linked to a “suggested unit,” listing “chronological eras and major developments or themes.” A separate *Suggested Unit Outlines* document rearranges the grade-level expectations and their related examples using the “suggested units” as organizing headings.

Kindergarten through second grade introduce basic concepts of community and change over time. Third grade focuses on cultural diversity, particularly Native Americans and recent immigrants, and fourth grade focuses on Washington state history.

The main U.S. history sequence is presented as a single course over grades five, eight, and eleven. Fifth grade is to cover from pre-settlement to 1791, eighth grade from 1776 to 1900, and eleventh grade from 1890 to the present.

## Evaluation

Like many frameworks built on social studies theory, Washington’s standards emphasize concepts and thinking skills over specific knowledge. “Facts,” we are told, “are critically important—but facts should be the building blocks for understanding trends, ideas, and

### DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

**Washington State K–12 Social Studies Learning Standards, U.S. history segments (2008)**

**Accessed from:**

<http://www.k12.wa.us/SocialStudies/pubdocs/SocialStudiesStandards.pdf>

**Suggested Unit Outlines for Social Studies GLEs, K–12, U.S. history segments (2008)**

**Accessed from:**

<http://www.k12.wa.us/SocialStudies/EALRs-GLEs.aspx>

principles, not stand-alone bits of memorized data.” This is all well and good, so long as students *have* factual knowledge on which to build. But sadly, the Washington standards outline no such content. The state defers instead to local control, allowing local districts “considerable latitude” in selecting content, so as to better “tailor” their courses “to their students’ and community’s particular interests and needs.”

The standards’ fragmentary and optional historical examples are offered merely as tools for addressing “social studies concepts.” As a result, they may turn up under any strand. Historical context is plainly not a top priority. For example, the last component in the history strand directs students to use “history to understand the present and plan for the future”—a blatant invitation to judge history based on present-day values and evaluate it in terms of personal relevance.

Early grades offer little other than vague generalizations about community and chronology, along with a pointed emphasis on Native Americans and minority groups. The state thereupon adopts the unfortunate model, favored in many states, of a single, once-through U.S. history sequence. As a result, the entire colonial period is relegated solely to fifth grade, where students’ sophistication is limited. But then, any given course scope remains just the “recommended context” in which students may explore their own “understanding of social studies concepts.”

Fifth grade begins the main U.S. history sequence. Unfortunately, the scattered historical examples provided are split among all the strands. For instance, “the reasons why colonists chose to dump tea into the Boston Harbor on December 16, 1773” turns up under an economics heading on comparing wants and needs. The actual history strand is barely more focused. Under the “historical chronology” heading, students are to understand that there were basic eras in early America. Two of these three eras are defined principally in terms of Native Americans, whose presence is said to date from “time immemorial,” as if they sprouted from the earth at the beginning of time—ignoring the actual, datable, historical arrival of early Asiatic peoples across the Bering land bridge. Suggested examples include the early Anasazi, and how Puritan-Wampanoag interaction defines the entire period from 1492 to 1763 “as a time of encounter.” Students are also treated to the profound observation that the founding of various colonies defines “the history of the Americas between 1492 and 1763 as a time of settlement and colonization.” They are likewise to understand how diseases among indigenous peoples “define this era as a time of devastation,” and “how Revolution and Constitution help to define U.S. history from 1763 to 1791.”

Under the history strand’s “causal factors” heading, students might consider the impact of Crispus Attucks (about whom very little is actually known), how George Washington led American forces to victory (the *only* reference in the standards to the man for whom the state is named), the impact of “various cultural groups,” or of technology and ideas. Or they might prefer to analyze how “the idea of democracy” —tossed in without further elaboration or historical context—“led the colonists to seek change by fighting Great Britain in the Revolutionary War.” Under the “multiple perspectives” heading, students may contrast the “colonists’ perspective of settlement and indigenous people’s perspective of genocide,” a term and concept that did not exist until after World War II. While using history “to understand the present and plan for the future,” they are invited to consider how ““no taxation without representation”” influences modern state “initiative processes,” or the how the Constitution’s “principles and ideals...affect current government and citizen decisions.”

The supplemental *Suggested Unit Outlines* offer little help. Here the grade-level expectations and examples are re-organized by broad and sometimes vaguely defined eras (e.g., “US—Encounter, Colonization, and Devastation” or “US—Independence”), rather than under the thematic component headings as in the main standards. But no additional content or clarification is added. The same broadly thematic grade-level expectations are repeated from the standards, along with the same examples. Worse, the expectations *within* each broad era are still grouped by strand. Thus, even with the *Unit Outlines’* supposedly chronological arrangement, each era’s content is still arbitrarily broken up.

In the eighth-grade *Standards*, nothing changes; the examples are slightly more specific but still fragmentary. An assortment of laws and court cases appear under civics; business, commerce, and tariffs appear under economics. Extremely broad eras are mentioned under history, backed up with disconnected examples organized by theme. Even in the supposedly chronological arrangement of the *Unit Outlines*, the thematic and strand-based expectations continue to wreak havoc with chronology. For instance, one segment goes from Andrew Jackson’s tariffs, to industrialization, to the plantation system, *back* to the structure of the Constitution and the Louisiana Purchase, then on to the Cherokee removal, the Mexican War, *Marbury v. Madison*, the impeachment of Andrew Johnson, checks and balances under Andrew Jackson, then *back* to Johnson’s impeachment, and finally to Native American removal.

In eleventh grade, the standards assert that “students have the intellectual and social capacity to develop serious historical knowledge and perspective, geographic literacy, economic understanding, and civic wisdom and commitment.” A new

course, “U.S history and government, 1890 to the present,” is offered as “the recommended context” in which students may “tap this capacity.” But the situation is in fact identical to fifth and eighth grades: The organization remains purely conceptual, and the historical examples remain as random, disconnected, and useless as in the earlier grades. The only difference is that the examples refer to a later period.

## Content and Rigor Conclusion

There are slivers of historical content in Washington’s “suggested examples,” but they are presented without context, connection, or explanation. It is a sadly revealing irony that the state named for George Washington says nothing about his unique and decisive role in establishing American constitutional democracy. Historical examples are *mentioned* as they apply to overarching themes, but nothing is outlined or explicated. The business of choosing and imparting specific knowledge is left to local teachers and districts. What content there is often seeks to inculcate politicized viewpoints, particularly regarding Native Americans. With a repetitive emphasis on personal relevance, history becomes merely a tool to aid students’ own growth, not a foundational subject worthy of understanding in its own right. The chaotic and overly general historical content barely earns a two out of seven for Content and Rigor. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

## Clarity and Specificity Conclusion

Washington’s standards are undermined from the start by their fixation on concept over content. The maze of learning requirements and grade-level expectations lays out arbitrarily divided abstract ideas; historical detail, offered only as “examples,” is fragmented and incoherent. Even the *Suggested Unit Outlines*, meant to organize the various thematic blocks by time period, only create bundles of disconnected examples, still organized thematically *within* each period. Course scope is explicitly left to local teachers and districts; sequence is outlined, but may be modified locally. The sequence itself is flawed, relegating all earlier periods to early grades, where students’ sophistication is inevitably less developed—though it is, of course, up to teachers and districts to provide meaningful detail at *any* level. Washington’s confused and disorganized standards earn a one out of three for Clarity and Specificity. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

# WEST VIRGINIA • U.S. HISTORY



GRADE

**D**

SCORES

Content and Rigor 3/7  
Clarity and Specificity 1/3

TOTAL SCORE

**4/10**

## Overview

West Virginia's standards contain some rudimentary U.S. history content. Unfortunately, it is fragmentary and shallow, lacking specifics, explanation, and context. A confusing thematic organization splinters this already limited content and modern political bias further undermines context and comprehension.

## Goals and Organization

West Virginia's social studies standards provide grade-specific outlines for each grade, K–12. Each is first divided into six strands, or “content standards”: citizenship, civics/government, economics, geography, history, and reading. Each strand begins with several bullet points, identical for each grade, laying out broad conceptual aims. The five bullet points for the history strand direct students to: compare historical events, distinguish cause-effect relationships, theorize alternative actions and outcomes, and anticipate future application; gather and analyze historical data; develop historical knowledge of major events, individuals, cultures, and the humanities; analyze broad-scale interdependence; and examine development and change in political institutions and theories. These five points are classified, respectively, as “chronology,” “skills and application,” “culture and humanities,” “interpretation and evaluation,” and “political institutions.”

Performance descriptors for each strand then give short statements of skills or knowledge that students should demonstrate at distinguished, above mastery, mastery, partial mastery, and novice levels. Finally, “objectives,” which largely echo the performance descriptors, provide grade-level expectations for the strand.

Kindergarten through third grade focus on basic concepts of citizenship, diversity, heroes, and symbols.

The U.S. history sequence consists of two two-year courses. Fourth grade covers from pre-settlement to the American Revolution; fifth grade continues from the Revolution to present. Tenth grade again covers pre-settlement to 1900, while eleventh grade continues from 1900 to present.

## Evaluation

West Virginia's requirement of two full two-year U.S. courses would seem promising if its standards did not heavily emphasize concepts rather than substance. The performance descriptors and objectives do invoke some history. However, they supply a partial and rudimentary content outline at best. Worse still, the intellectually and visually confusing division of related material among the six strands, and among the overlapping descriptors

### DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

21st Century Social Studies Content Standards and Objectives for West Virginia Schools, U.S. history segments (2009)

Accessed from:

<http://wvde.state.wv.us/policies/p2520.4.pdf>

and objectives, sacrifices chronological logic and coherence. Arbitrary thematic organization robs the standards' limited content of clarity.

The state's education officials term this confusing structure a comprehensive guide and "powerful resource" for achieving "high quality standards"—particularly when used in conjunction "with the creativity and instructional expertise of West Virginia teachers" to create "a rigorous, relevant and challenging social studies curriculum." In reality, however, far too much discretion for defining content is left to the "instructional expertise" of teachers. The state has set standards in name only, abdicating its responsibility to establish solid minimum content expectations for all students and a shared core of content for all public schools.

West Virginia seems principally concerned with evaluating abstract student skills rather than specifying what students should actually *know*. An inordinate amount of space is devoted to the performance descriptors and their various levels of achievement. Yet these descriptors themselves fail to make meaningful distinctions even between the highest performance (distinguished) and the lowest (novice). Distinguished fifth graders, for instance, are to "summarize the events and...relevant historic figures that led the U.S. to become a world power." Lower achievement levels are *identical*, save that students are, in descending order, to "evaluate," "analyze," "identify," and "list." "Summarize" and "list," the top and bottom ratings, are essentially the same, and both are surely *less* demanding than the median ratings, "evaluate" and "analyze."

Early grades focus on basic and general concepts and remain extraordinarily non-specific. In third grade, we find a few rather random people and groups mentioned: "Pilgrims, George Washington, American Revolution, Abe Lincoln, Civil War, Columbus, Native Americans, Rosa Parks, [and] Martin Luther King, Jr." These are the sole specific historical references before the fourth grade.

Fourth grade introduces the first two-year U.S. history sequence, but it is superficial and disorganized. Beliefs and rights are mentioned in the citizenship standard. Abstract discussion of limited government, coupled with Washington's Farewell Address, appears under civics. (Note that even civics and citizenship are separated in this social studies categorization.) Economics merely mentions the economic roots of the Revolution, while geography touches upon regional settlement patterns. Content under the history standard remains brief and vague: for instance, distinguished students are to "summarize major historical periods and events in sequence in North America through the Revolutionary Period, including the stories of various groups and research to prove

how specific events influenced choices made by different groups." Similar items mention the "relative importance of various influences" on the colonies—with unfortunate tunnel vision, only slavery is named—and the "relative importance" of unnamed explorers. In the objectives, students are to "list" fifteenth- and sixteenth-century explorers, "chronologically organize and categorize the major events" of the American Revolution, describe how Africans came to America, discuss European-Native American contact, and compare English, French, and Spanish settlements—all without any details. Note, too, that students are to "chronologically organize" the events of the Revolution, yet this directive appears before references to cultural contact and early settlements.

Fifth grade continues in much the same vein, asking students to explain the "significance" of "historical figures," the "events" and "historic figures" that made America a world power, and the "influence" of westward migration and transportation. The Constitution and Bill of Rights are lumped together with the Emancipation Proclamation. Immigrant groups and industry are merely mentioned. "Patriotism, abolition of slavery, women's suffrage, labor movements, [and the] Civil Rights Movement" are bewilderingly tossed together as examples of "freedom of expressions [*sic*]." A few "important figures" appear, such as "George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, Sojourner Truth, Susan B. Anthony, Eleanor Roosevelt and Martin Luther King, Jr.," along with a few frontier pioneers, Native American leaders, and civil rights figures. The Great Depression and World War II are mentioned in passing. A few items are at least historically meaningful. For instance, students should "explain the issues faced by Washington when he became the first United States President," or "explain why various reconstruction plans succeeded or failed." But these are offered without any required substantive content.

In tenth grade, content crops up randomly among the various standards. Under history, the descriptors remain hopelessly broad. The objectives offer a fitful semblance of an outline with meager detail: European-Native American contact; issues of sovereignty and taxation in the Revolution; "challenges faced by the new United States government"; how the Constitution dealt with problems in the Articles of Confederation; early national policy ("e.g., Monroe Doctrine, Manifest Destiny, Washington's Farewell Address, [and the] War of 1812"), and on through the nineteenth century. But a vast amount of the most basic historical content is omitted completely: Jacksonian democracy, for example, or any of the antebellum crises. The Hamilton-Jefferson schism does merit a mention, but under economics. What is offered frequently defies chronology and common sense: What does "justify how the effects of European empire building led to the American Revolution" even mean? Students are also urged to make ahistorical judgments through

a present-day lens; for instance, they should “critique reasons for” westward expansion, and “recommend alternative actions” in place of nineteenth-century Native American policy.

Eleventh grade presents a similar hodgepodge. The outlines provide brief lists of social issues and events from World War I to the two Gulf Wars, before jumping to hazy items on the causes and impact of the Great Depression, World War II, and the Cold War, with sudden segues into “universal human rights,” “the world labor movement,” and so forth—again with no chronological coherence and erratic historical coverage.

## Content and Rigor Conclusion

There are fragments of content in West Virginia’s standards, but it is generally vague and decontextualized, with little sense of chronology or development. Only occasional items raise issues of any sophistication, and even these lack context or specifics. Too many directives encourage students to judge history based on the present, rather than to comprehend it in its context. The inclusion of two full two-year U.S. history courses would be commendable, if meaningful core *content* were outlined for those courses. There is some improvement in rigor and detail at the high school level, but even here, content is fragmented and rushed. Teachers should be able to look to state standards for guidance in designing their courses. Yet West Virginia seems mainly interested in abstract standards for evaluating student progress; teachers are expected to construct a curriculum by themselves. The state’s patchy and disordered specifics earn a three out of seven for Content and Rigor. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

## Clarity and Specificity Conclusion

The structure of West Virginia’s standards is unwieldy and confusing, both visually and intellectually. Sequence is clear and sensible, with grades four and five, then ten and eleven devoted to two U.S. history surveys. But actual course *scope* is barely defined. Within each grade, content is divided among overlapping and arbitrary categories. Furthermore, the vague performance descriptors offer little help in defining expectations or measuring achievement. There is little or no meaningful difference between “distinguished” and “novice,” with intermediate levels of skill barely distinguishable from each other. The objectives are scattershot and disorganized; detail ranges from inadequate to absent. West Virginia has only supplied the rudiments of historical content. There is a considerable distance to go before its *Standards* can be considered a “comprehensive” or “powerful resource.” At best, they earn a one out of three for Clarity and Specificity. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

# WISCONSIN • U.S. HISTORY



GRADE

**F**

SCORES

Content and Rigor 0/7  
Clarity and Specificity 0/3

TOTAL SCORE

**0/10**

## Overview

Wisconsin’s U.S. history standards, for all practical purposes, do not exist. Their sole content is a list of ten eras in American and Wisconsin history, followed by a few brief and vague directives to understand vast swaths of history and broad historical concepts. Determining an actual course’s scope, sequence, and content rests entirely on the shoulders of local teachers and districts.

## Goals and Organization

Wisconsin’s social studies standards are divided among five strands: geography, history, political science and citizenship, economics, and behavioral sciences. Each strand consists of a “content standard”—a one-sentence statement of the strand’s purpose—and a one-paragraph “rationale” justifying its importance. The history strand also includes short lists of ten chronological/thematic eras for Wisconsin, U.S. history, and world history. The ten listed eras of U.S. history are said to apply to grades 5–12, and those for Wisconsin history to grades 4–12.

Each strand is provided with “performance standards” for fourth, eighth, and twelfth grades. The history performance standards consist of ten to eighteen single-sentence objectives, listed without chronological or substantive organization, laying out broad skills and directing comprehension of broad historical issues. Although some performance standards address specific regions or periods, the listed standards are not subdivided by time, place, or subject.

The scope and sequence of history content are nearly impossible to discern, since the state leaves all decisions on what content to cover, and in which grades to cover it, to local districts. A Social Studies Scope and Sequence guide accompanies the standards on the state Department of Public Instruction website, but provides few specifics.

From pre-Kindergarten through third grade, students are to explore “people” and “self” (with special reference to television and Internet). In fourth and fifth grades, U.S. and Wisconsin history “are usually taught,” but are apparently not required. Content in grades six through eight “varies,” but “often” focuses on “cultural perspectives” and “global connections,” which may include “the United States and citizenship.” Course scope in high school “can vary greatly among school districts.” A stated expectation that all five strands will be addressed seems to require that U.S. and Wisconsin history will be taught in high school, but apparently they need not be emphasized: “Often one strand is selected as the main focus with the other strands integrated where they best fit.”

### DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

**Wisconsin Model Academic Standards for Social Studies, U.S. history segments (1998)**

**Accessed from:**

<http://dpi.state.wi.us/standards/ssstanb.html>

## Evaluation

Wisconsin’s standards are thin to the point of vanishing. In terms of meaningful historical content to guide teachers or students, there is simply nothing there.

A short guide to “best practices” urges teachers, in classic social studies language, to focus on “indepth [*sic*] study,” avoiding the “cursory coverage of a lock step curriculum,” focusing instead on “content,” “concepts,” and “case studies,” which “students must know and apply to their lives outside of school.” Unfortunately, content is left as the poor relation among these broad conceptual aims. Students must surely *gain* specific knowledge before they can apply it—yet historical specifics are all but omitted by the Badger State.

Local districts must, we are told, have “the flexibility to determine” not only classroom sequence and organization but also the “content of their social studies curriculum.” For “if teachers are to understand fully the performance standards and the spiraling nature of the content and concepts, they must be actively involved in the process of selecting content and materials.” Yet the only result of such “spiraling” seems likely to be dizzy teachers. They are told to “select” content for their courses but are given no meaningful guidance in doing so. The state abdicates the responsibility of standards to define minimum and shared content expectations for all students. Teachers and districts are left on their own.

The history standard announces that students will learn about Wisconsin, United States, and world history, studying “change and continuity over time in order to develop historical perspective, explain historical relationships, and analyze issues that affect the present and the future.” The standard’s brief rationale explains that students must “understand their historical roots and how past events have shaped their world,” and “must know what life was like in the past and how things change and develop over time” in order to develop “these insights.”

The lists of eras, ten apiece for Wisconsin, United States, and world history, follow. Wisconsin history, assigned to grades four through twelve, is broken down into such units as “the prehistory and the early history of Wisconsin’s native people,” and “early explorers, traders, and settlers to 1812,” mentioning statehood, immigration, the Civil War, “mining, lumber, and agriculture,” LaFollette and Progressivism, the World Wars, the Great Depression, industrialization, urbanization, and “20<sup>th</sup> century change.” For U.S. history, assigned to grades five through twelve, the list commences with “the prehistory and early history of the Americas to 1607,” and “colonial history and settlement, 1607–1763.” It then continues, mentioning the American Revolution and early national period, “the paradox of nationalism and sectionalism in an expanding nation,” the Civil War and Reconstruction, industry and urbanization, World War

I and America as a world power, the Great Depression and the New Deal, “World War II, the Cold War, the Korean War, and the Vietnamese conflict, 1941–1975,” and “the search for prosperity and equal rights in Cold War and post-Cold War America, 1945–present.”

In terms of substantive course guidance, that’s it. The performance standards offer brief sentences laying out concepts and skills that students are expected to demonstrate. Ten are provided in fourth grade, twelve for eighth grade, and eighteen for twelfth grade—and these cover U.S., Wisconsin, and world history *together*.

Fourth graders, for example, are told to study “the lives of ordinary and extraordinary people, place them in time and context, and explain their relationship to important historical events” using “biographies, stories, narratives, and folk tales.” But no people, events, or specific sources are actually mentioned. Students are likewise to “compare and contrast” past and present by examining the “social, economic, political, and cultural roles played by individuals and groups”—though again, no specific individuals or groups are named. Other items briefly refer to “important events and famous people in Wisconsin and United States history” (none are specified) and “examples of cooperation and interdependence among individuals, groups, and nations” (none are specified). Native American history is mentioned in passing, as are democratic values, technologies, holidays, and symbols. But there is no historical content.

The eighth-grade performance standards are much the same; for instance, “employ cause-and-effect arguments to demonstrate how significant events have influenced the past and the present in United States and world history,” or “describe the relationships between and among significant events, such as the causes and consequences of wars in United States and world history.” The only specifics are brief references to the Declaration of Independence, Constitution, and Bill of Rights in relation to “political values.” By twelfth grade—where a few world religions are the only specifics mentioned—students are supposed to “recall, select, and analyze significant historical periods and the relationships among them,” “assess the validity of different interpretations of significant historical events,” and use “visual and quantitative data” to analyze history in general. They are also to explain war, slavery, religion, art, technology, intellectual life, and international relations. Hopefully, their teachers, left to their own devices, will have taught the students some of the content with which they might do so.

## Content and Rigor Conclusion

Apart from brief lists of eras, the Wisconsin standards, concerned solely with generalized social studies concepts

and skills, contain no history whatsoever. What students are actually to learn is left to their district officials and teachers, who are given no guidance on structuring courses or curricula. The inflated generalities in the twelfth-grade performance standards are even more all-encompassing, but this can hardly be called an increase in rigor. Wisconsin warrants a zero out of seven for Content and Rigor. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

## Clarity and Specificity Conclusion

The state’s social studies “scope and sequence” guide vaguely describes what is “usually” done or “may” be done—but hardly any *guidance* is offered at all. Course scope is undefined, detail is nonexistent, and even the nebulous performance standards are offered for just three grade levels. This is part and parcel of the entire document: Wisconsin leaves all decisions on substance and sequence to districts and teachers. Students require specific knowledge before they can analyze or understand history, but the Wisconsin standards are happy to leave such details to others. The state seems to deride the very idea of a shared, core education as mere rote memorization. It appears to be concerned only that students somehow enrich their understanding of, and relationship with, the world. Wisconsin’s empty standards earn a zero out of three for Clarity and Specificity. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

# WYOMING • U.S. HISTORY

GRADE

**F**

SCORES

Content and Rigor 0/7  
Clarity and Specificity 0/3

TOTAL SCORE

**0/10**

## Overview

Despite much lofty rhetoric about the importance of knowing and understanding our common heritage, Wyoming's U.S. history standards are devoid of U.S. history. No course sequence is defined nor content laid out. In the name of educational freedom, the state offers teachers no guidance or requirements whatsoever. If Wyoming students achieve a shared core of historical knowledge, it will only be through their districts' and teachers' unassisted efforts.

## Goals and Organization

Wyoming's social studies standards are divided first into five strands or "content standards": citizenship, government, and democracy; culture and cultural diversity; production, distribution, and consumption; time, continuity, and change; and people, places, and environments. The state then provides cumulative benchmarks which are designed to define "what students are expect [*sic*] to know and be able to do at the end of each of the benchmark grade levels," (which are fourth, eighth, and eleventh grades). Finally, the benchmarks are followed by "performance level descriptors," which ostensibly describe "how well students must perform" the benchmarks to be classified advanced, proficient, basic, and below basic. (In fact, these performance descriptors largely restate the benchmarks themselves.)

The benchmarks and performance descriptors are entirely general and conceptual. No specific content is assigned to any particular grade or grade block.

## Evaluation

Wyoming's standards, the state informs us, "specify the essential learning that students must master." In actuality, however, the "essential learning" the state defines is general and wholly conceptual. Any specific course content is left to districts and teachers—or, perhaps, textbook publishers.

The closest we get to a true history category in the standards is the "time, continuity, and change" strand. According to the introductory material, it is meant to "provide for the study of ways human beings view themselves in and over time," thus developing students' "historical knowledge, skills, and values"—whatever that may mean. There is much talk of "historical perspectives," and "sophisticated analysis and reconstruction of the past"; students are to "integrate individual stories about people, events, and situations" into a "holistic conception," studying "important historical figures and events" at every grade level.

### DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

**Wyoming Social Studies Content and Performance Standards, U.S. history segments (2008)**

**Accessed from:**

<http://www.k12.wy.us/SA/standards/Standards%202008%20Social%20Studies.pdf>

But Wyoming’s standards do nothing to explain any such figures or events. They do not indicate that any particular material should be taught at any given grade—or, indeed, ever. The introduction notes that the standards of New York, California, and Massachusetts were consulted to “establish the rigor” of Wyoming’s curriculum, yet Wyoming seems to have learned nothing from those states’ comprehensive and sophisticated outlines. In Wyoming, we find no distinction between U.S. and world history, and no sequence at all—just exhortations to “understand” barely defined concepts.

The three fourth-grade benchmarks under “time, continuity, and change” invoke “state and national persons, holidays, and symbols,” “how current events influence individuals, communities, state, country, and/or world,” and “the chronology of exploration, immigration and settlement of Wyoming”—all without any examples. The performance descriptors inform us that advanced students “explain the roles of significant political leaders and the significance of various holidays,” “sequentially reconstruct the chronology of the major events and people during the exploration, immigration, and settlement of Wyoming,” and “support their opinions and give a rationale about current events.” Merely proficient students “identify” rather than “explain,” must be given data, and “express” rather than “support” opinions. Basic students identify only “some” leaders and holidays, must be given data and assistance, and “express some opinions” about current events. (Below-basic students simply fail to meet the standard.) These rhetorical guidelines are arbitrary, content-free, and impossible to measure; they offer little meaningful guidance to teachers.

By eighth grade, students are—in the citizenship strand—to “understand the historical perspective and issues involved in the development of the U.S. Constitution,” but again no context or explanation is supplied. Under “culture,” they are to “describe cultural diversity and the interdependence of cultures.” In the “time, continuity and change” benchmarks, they are to “identify people, events, problems, conflicts, and ideas and explain their historical significance,” “discuss current events to better understand the world in which they live,” and “analyze the impact of historical events and people on present conditions, situations, or circumstances.” Advanced students now “discuss and analyze,” while the proficient merely “understand.”

By eleventh grade, students—again under citizenship—are to understand the principles of democracy, and again “explain the historical development of the U.S. Constitution and how it has shaped the U.S. and Wyoming governmental systems.” And again, there are no details. Under the culture strand, they are to “explain how various cultural influences impact society,” and “how shared cultural experiences influence

peoples’ perceptions of prominent historical figures, groups, institutions, and world events.” Under “time, continuity and change”—now up to *four* benchmarks—students are to “analyze the interactions among individuals and groups and their impact on significant historical events,” “analyze current events,” “evaluate the impact of technology and how it has shaped history and influenced the modern world,” and “explain how past events impact the present and the future.” As always, they are to do so without any historical examples, specifics, or explanation.

## Content and Rigor Conclusion

With the exception of the Constitution and Bill of Rights, *not a single name, event, date, or era in U.S. history is mentioned in Wyoming’s standards*. There is much rhetoric about the “formal study of history” and “sophisticated analysis and reconstruction of the past,” but no substantive curriculum is specified in any way, shape, or form. The introduction speaks of rigor, but how can a total lack of content be considered rigorous? Nothing is offered but sweeping generalities, enjoining students to “understand” and “analyze” an undefined past. If students are to have any historical knowledge to analyze, it will have to be defined by districts and teachers acting on their own initiative. This pattern is familiar: Under the guise of protecting teacher creativity and classroom freedom, Wyoming entirely abdicates *any* role in creating a usable curriculum. The state fully deserves its zero out of seven for Content and Rigor. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

## Clarity and Specificity Conclusion

Wyoming provides no sequence and no scope. No specific course is ever mentioned, let alone outlined, described, or assigned to a particular grade. Detail is nonexistent; students are only told to understand categories such as time, change, diversity, people, and places—generalizations that cannot be measured. If individual schools offer substantive U.S. history courses—or, indeed, *any* substantive courses within the web of social studies abstractions—the lucky students will have only their teachers and local officials to thank for it. Wyoming’s standards, long on theory and short on specifics, earn a zero out of three for Clarity and Specificity. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

# APPENDIX A:

## Methods, Grading, and Criteria



### Methods

This study examined the NAEP U.S. history assessment framework, as well as each state’s history and/or social studies standards with an eye toward determining how rigorously and completely they address U.S. history. Like other Fordham Institute reviews of state standards, this analysis focuses solely on the quality of the standards themselves. We do not look at whether they are linked to a robust accountability system or whether they are being effectively implemented by the states.

Our approach was straightforward: We gathered the most recent versions of academic standards from all the states and asked trusted content experts to apply a set of criteria to them.

Beginning in spring 2009, Fordham staff searched state education-department websites and downloaded all of the relevant and up-to-date standards documents posted. This exhaustive search yielded, for some states, hundreds of pages of documents, consisting of everything from standards to assessment materials to curriculum guides. All of these documents were sent to Drs. Sheldon and Jeremy Stern for their review.

The reviewers combed through each state’s standards documents, selected the most relevant material, including assessments and curriculum frameworks when appropriate, and verified that these were the most recent standards adopted by the state. These are the documents identified at the beginning of each review. Fordham staff then rechecked these materials in the fall of 2010 to ensure that nothing had changed. To the best of our knowledge, all standards were current as of November 2010.

Our content experts then applied pre-determined criteria to the standards. (The criteria themselves are set out below.) They assigned two scores to each set of standards: one for “Content and Rigor,” the other for “Clarity and Specificity.” Content and Rigor is scored on a 0–7 point scale while Clarity and Specificity is scored on a 0–3 point scale.

Scores for Content and Rigor were added to that of Clarity and Specificity. The combined totals were translated into letter grades as follows:

Grade	Points
A	10
A-	9
B+	8
B	7
C	5 or 6
D	3 or 4
F	0, 1, or 2

To make comparisons across disciplines possible, we used the same grading metric as in earlier analyses of state, national, and international English language arts (ELA) and math standards. *Stars By Which To Navigate: Scanning National And International Education Standards in 2009*, a recent Fordham report, provided in-depth analyses of national and international benchmark assessment standards. In *The State of State Standards—and the Common Core—in 2010*, we reviewed state ELA and math standards alongside the

final Common Core ELA and math standards. (Both of these earlier reviews are available on the Fordham Institute website.)

## Grading Metric

### » CONTENT AND RIGOR

#### **7 points: Standards meet all of the following criteria:**

- Standards are top-notch in terms of the content chosen. The coverage of the subject is suitable, good decisions have been made about what topics to include, and nothing of importance has been overlooked. (No more than 5 percent of the content outlined in the subject specific content expectations is missing.)
- Not only is the appropriate content covered by the standards, but it is covered well (i.e., in a high quality manner).
- Good decisions have also been made about what content should be left out. Excellent standards do not include much superfluous material. (No more than 5 percent of the content in the standards is unnecessary.)
- Standards distinguish between more important and less important content and skills either directly (i.e., by articulating which are more or less important) OR via the number of standards dedicated to particular content and skills (i.e., more important content/skills have more standards while less important content/skills have fewer standards). The standards do not overemphasize topics of little importance or underemphasize topics of great importance.
- The level of rigor is appropriate for the targeted grade level(s). Students are expected to learn the content and skills in a sensible order and an appropriately increasing level of difficulty. The standards, taken as a whole, define a core literacy for all students in the subject under review; at the same time, the standards that run through twelfth grade are sufficiently challenging to ensure that students who achieve proficiency by the final year of high school will be ready for college or work and citizenship.
- The standards do not overemphasize the importance of students' life experiences or "real world" problems. They do not embrace fads, suggest political bias, or teach moral dogma. They do not imply that all interpretations are equally valid (regardless of logic or the adequacy of supporting evidence). The standards also avoid other major subject-specific problems identified by the reviewers. While the standards are not perfect, any defects are marginal.

#### **6: Standards fall short in one or more of the following ways:**

- Some crucial content (as specified in the subject-specific content expectations) is missing (at least 5 percent and up to 20 percent).
- The content is covered satisfactorily but not in a high quality manner.
- Some of the content in the standards is unnecessary (at least 5 percent and up to 20 percent).
- Standards do not fully distinguish between more and less important content and skills (i.e., importance is neither expressly articulated nor conveyed via the number of standards dedicated to particular topics). In other words, the standards overemphasize no more than one or two topics of little importance or underemphasize no more than one or two topics of great importance.
- Standards at particular grade levels are not quite as rigorous as they could be, or are too rigorous (i.e., expectations are slightly too high or too low).
- There are minor problems or shortcomings (e.g., one or more of the problems listed in the last paragraph under score 7 affects the standards in a small way, or there are other minor subject-specific problems).

**5: Standards fall short in one or more of the following ways:**

- Some crucial content is missing (at least 20 percent and up to 35 percent).
- While most of the appropriate content is covered by the standards, the content is nonetheless covered in a manner that is not satisfactory (i.e., the standards cover the right material but do not cover that material robustly; thus, the material is shortchanged in some way).
- Some of the content in the standards is unnecessary (at least 20 percent and up to 35 percent).
- Standards do not distinguish between more and less important content and skills (i.e., importance is not articulated or conveyed in any way). The standards often overemphasize topics of little importance or underemphasize topics of great importance.
- Standards generally need to be more or less rigorous than they are at certain grade levels (i.e., expectations are too high or too low).
- There may be an important shortcoming (perhaps one of the problems listed in the last paragraph of score 7, or there are other subject-specific problems).

**4: Standards fall short in one or more of the following ways:**

- At least 35 percent and up to 50 percent of crucial content is missing.
- Some of the content in the standards is unnecessary (at least 35 percent and up to 50 percent).
- There may be a few critical shortcomings (as listed above) although the standards contain no serious errors.

**3: Standards fall short in one or more of the following ways:**

- At least 50 percent and up to 65 percent of crucial content is missing.
- At least 50 percent and up to 65 percent of the content in the standards is unnecessary.
- There are serious problems, shortcomings or errors in the standards, although the standards have some redeeming qualities and there is some evidence of rigor.

**2: Standards fall short in one or more of the following ways:**

- At least 65 percent and up to 80 percent of crucial content is missing.
- At least 65 percent and up to 80 percent of the content in the standards is unnecessary.
- There may be several serious problems, shortcomings, or errors (as listed above).

**1: Standards fall short in one or more of the following ways:**

- At least 80 percent of crucial content is missing.
- At least 80 percent of the content in the standards is unnecessary.
- There are numerous problems, shortcomings, or errors (as listed above).

**0: Standards fall short in one or more of the following ways:**

- The content of the standards does not address or barely addresses the subject-specific content expectations.
- The content is poorly chosen and fails to provide the level of rigor appropriate for the targeted grade level(s).
- Content is full of problems, shortcomings, and errors (as listed above).

## » CLARITY AND SPECIFICITY

**3 points: Standards are coherent, clear, and well organized.**

- The scope and sequence of the material is apparent and sensible. They provide solid guidance to users (students, teachers, curriculum directors, test developers, textbook writers, etc.) about the content knowledge and skills required to do well on the exam. The right level of detail is provided.
- The documents are written in prose that the general public can understand and are mostly free from jargon. The standards describe things that are measurable (i.e., can lead to observable, comparable results across students and schools). The standards as a whole clearly illustrate the growth expected through the grades.

**2: The standards are somewhat lacking in coherence, clarity, or organization.**

- The scope and sequence of the material is not completely apparent or sensible. The standards do not quite provide a complete guide to users as to the content knowledge and skills required to do well on the exam (i.e., as a guide for users, there are shortcomings that were not already addressed by the content and rigor score). The standards provide insufficient detail. The prose is generally comprehensible but there is some jargon and some vague or unclear language. Some standards are not measurable.

**1: The standards are somewhat coherent, clear, and organized.**

- They offer limited guidance to users (students, teachers, curriculum directors, textbook writers, etc.) about the content knowledge and skills required to do well on the exam, but there are significant shortcomings (as a guide for users) that were not already addressed by the content and rigor score. The standards are seriously lacking in detail, and much of their language is vague enough to leave unclear what is being asked of students and teachers.

**0: The standards are incoherent and/or disorganized.**

- They are not helpful to users. The standards are sorely lacking in detail. Scope and sequence is a mystery.

## » CONTENT-SPECIFIC CRITERIA: U.S. HISTORY

These criteria provide illustrative examples of the kinds of essential content that rigorous U.S. history standards would demand all students have learned by the end of grades four, eight, and twelve, respectively. These parenthetical examples are not meant to be comprehensive lists of all content students should learn, but rather to be illustrative examples of essential historical knowledge and skills.

**By the end of fourth grade, standards should require students to:**

- identify important leaders (for example, Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and Reagan), holidays (Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, Presidents Day, Memorial Day, Independence Day, and Veterans Day), and events (the American Revolution, the drafting and ratification of the Constitution, the Civil War and Reconstruction, the Industrial Revolution, the two world wars and the Cold War, constitutional amendments to end slavery and establish women's suffrage, *Brown v. Board of Education*, and the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts of 1964-5).
- demonstrate a clear sense of chronology (for example, the American Revolution took place in the late eighteenth century, the Civil War in the mid-nineteenth century, and the two world wars in the twentieth century) and the key people associated with specific events (e.g., Franklin, Washington, and Jefferson with the American Revolution; Lincoln, Grant, and Lee with the Civil War).
- identify sources most commonly used by historians (letters, diaries, etc.).
- read and understand basic primary sources (the Declaration of Independence, the Gettysburg Address, and the "I Have a Dream" speech) and be able to explain their roles in past events.

**By the end of eighth grade, standards should require students to:**

- recognize key changes over time in American ideas and institutions (the growing resistance to slavery, the gradual acceptance of equal rights for women and minorities, and the expanding role of the presidency in American society).
- identify and explain the influence of multiple factors (political, social, geographic, economic, and demographic) on history (for example, the political impact of the Supreme Court's role in interpreting the law, the importance of slavery in causing the Civil War, and how the Great Depression redefined the role of the federal government in the national economy).
- demonstrate an understanding of the difference between primary and secondary sources (for example, James Madison's notes at the 1787 Constitutional Convention versus a twenty-first-century book about Madison's role at the Convention).
- distinguish between historical facts and historical interpretations.

**By the end of twelfth grade, standards should require students to:**

- discuss the significance and meaning of *e pluribus unum* (both the "many" and the "one") in U.S. history.
- show that they recognize that historical argument must take conflicting evidence into account and that differing interpretations of historical questions (liberal vs. conservative assessments of Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal or the causes of the Cold War) are often matters of judgment and values, not simply matters of fact.
- "think historically" and avoid "presentism" by demonstrating that they understand how past events looked to and were evaluated by people at the time, and demonstrate that they also understand how people's attitudes, values, and ideals have changed over time.
- make a coherent historical argument using both primary and secondary sources.
- recognize that historical interpretations often change as new evidence is discovered and new perspectives emerge (for example, interpretations of the Cuban missile crisis have been significantly altered by the release of documents from the former Soviet Union).

# APPENDIX B:

## Detailed State Grades, 2011

TABLE B-1 • 2011 U.S. HISTORY GRADES IN RANK ORDER

Jurisdiction	Grade	Content and Rigor Score	Clarity and Specificity Score
South Carolina	A	7	3
Alabama	A-	6	3
California	A-	6	3
District of Columbia	A-	6	3
Indiana	A-	6	3
Massachusetts	A-	6	3
NAEP	A-	7	2
New York	A-	6	3
Oklahoma	B+	5	3
Georgia	B	5	2
Michigan	B	5	2
Arizona	C	4	1
Florida	C	5	1
Hawaii	C	5	1
Kansas	C	4	1
Louisiana	C	4	1
Maryland	C	3	2
Minnesota	C	5	1
Nebraska	C	4	1
New Jersey	C	4	1
Tennessee	C	4	1
Utah	C	4	2
Virginia	C	5	1
Arkansas	D	3	1
Illinois	D	3	1
Kentucky	D	2	1
Nevada	D	3	1

Jurisdiction	Grade	Content and Rigor Score	Clarity and Specificity Score
New Mexico	D	2	1
Ohio	D	2	1
South Dakota	D	2	1
Texas	D	2	1
Washington	D	2	1
West Virginia	D	3	1
Alaska	F	0	0
Colorado	F	0	0
Connecticut	F	1	0
Delaware	F	0	0
Idaho	F	1	0
Iowa	F	0	0
Maine	F	0	0
Mississippi	F	1	1
Missouri	F	1	0
Montana	F	0	0
New Hampshire	F	0	0
North Carolina	F	1	1
North Dakota	F	1	1
Oregon	F	1	1
Pennsylvania	F	0	0
Vermont	F	1	0
Wisconsin	F	0	0
Wyoming	F	0	0
Rhode Island*	N/A	N/A	N/A

\* Rhode Island had not adopted official statewide U.S. history standards

TABLE B-2 • 2011 U.S. HISTORY GRADES IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER

Jurisdiction	Grade	Content and Rigor Score	Clarity and Specificity Score
Alabama	A-	6	3
Alaska	F	0	0
Arizona	C	4	1
Arkansas	D	3	1
California	A-	6	3
Colorado	F	0	0
Connecticut	F	1	0
Delaware	F	0	0
District of Columbia	A-	6	3
Florida	C	5	1
Georgia	B	5	2
Hawaii	C	5	1
Idaho	F	1	0
Illinois	D	3	1
Indiana	A-	6	3
Iowa	F	0	0
Kansas	C	4	1
Kentucky	D	2	1
Louisiana	C	4	1
Maine	F	0	0
Maryland	C	3	2
Massachusetts	A-	6	3
Michigan	B	5	2
Minnesota	C	5	1
Mississippi	F	1	1
Missouri	F	1	0
Montana	F	0	0

Jurisdiction	Grade	Content and Rigor Score	Clarity and Specificity Score
NAEP	A-	7	2
Nebraska	C	4	1
Nevada	D	3	1
New Hampshire	F	0	0
New Jersey	C	4	1
New Mexico	D	2	1
New York	A-	6	3
North Carolina	F	1	1
North Dakota	F	1	1
Ohio	D	2	1
Oklahoma	B+	5	3
Oregon	F	1	1
Pennsylvania	F	0	0
Rhode Island*	N/A	N/A	N/A
South Carolina	A	7	3
South Dakota	D	2	1
Tennessee	C	4	1
Texas	D	2	1
Utah	C	4	2
Vermont	F	1	0
Virginia	C	5	1
Washington	D	2	1
West Virginia	D	3	1
Wisconsin	F	0	0
Wyoming	F	0	0

\* Rhode Island had not adopted official statewide U.S. history standards

TABLE B-3 • 2011 TO 2003 COMPARISON OF STATE U.S. HISTORY GRADES IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER

Jurisdiction	2011 Grade	2003 Grade
Alabama	A-	A
Alaska	F	F
Arizona	C	A
Arkansas	D	F
California	A-	A
Colorado	F	D
Connecticut	F	D
Delaware	F	B
District of Columbia	A-	F
Florida	C	D
Georgia	B	B
Hawaii	C	F
Idaho	F	D
Illinois	D	F
Indiana	A-	A
Iowa	F	N/A
Kansas	C	B
Kentucky	D	F
Louisiana	C	D
Maine	F	F
Maryland	C	C
Massachusetts	A-	A
Michigan	B	F
Minnesota	C	F
Mississippi	F	F
Missouri	F	F
Montana	F	F
Nebraska	C	C

Jurisdiction	2011 Grade	2003 Grade
Nevada	D	C
New Hampshire	F	F
New Jersey	C	F
New Mexico	D	F
New York	A-	A
North Carolina	F	F
North Dakota	F	F
Ohio	D	D
Oklahoma	B+	B
Oregon	F	D
Pennsylvania	F	F
Rhode Island*	N/A	N/A
South Carolina	A	C
South Dakota	D	D
Tennessee	C	C
Texas	D	C
Utah	C	C
Vermont	F	F
Virginia	C	B
Washington	D	F
West Virginia	D	F
Wisconsin	F	F
Wyoming	F	F

Notes: Data for 2003 drawn from: Sheldon Stern, *Effective State Standards for U.S. History: A 2003 Report Card* (Washington, D.C.: Thomas B. Fordham Institute, 2003).

\* Rhode Island had not adopted official statewide U.S. history standards

TABLE B-4 • 2011 TO 2003 COMPARISON OF STATE U.S. HISTORY GRADES BY IMPROVEMENT STATUS

Jurisdiction	2011 Grade	2003 Grade	Improvement Status
Arkansas	D	F	+
District of Columbia	A-	F	+
Florida	C	D	+
Hawaii	C	F	+
Illinois	D	F	+
Kentucky	D	F	+
Louisiana	C	D	+
Michigan	B	F	+
Minnesota	C	F	+
New Jersey	C	F	+
New Mexico	D	F	+
South Carolina	A	C	+
Washington	D	F	+
West Virginia	D	F	+
Alabama*	A-	A	o
Alaska	F	F	o
California*	A-	A	o
Georgia	B	B	o
Indiana*	A-	A	o
Maine	F	F	o
Maryland	C	C	o
Massachusetts*	A-	A	o
Mississippi	F	F	o
Missouri	F	F	o
Montana	F	F	o
Nebraska	C	C	o
New Hampshire	F	F	o
North Carolina	F	F	o
North Dakota	F	F	o
New York*	A-	A	o
Ohio	D	D	o

Jurisdiction	2011 Grade	2003 Grade	Improvement Status
Oklahoma*	B+	B	o
Pennsylvania	F	F	o
South Dakota	D	D	o
Tennessee	C	C	o
Utah	C	C	o
Vermont	F	F	o
Wisconsin	F	F	o
Wyoming	F	F	o
Arizona	C	A	-
Colorado	F	D	-
Connecticut	F	D	-
Delaware	F	B	-
Idaho	F	D	-
Kansas	C	B	-
Nevada	D	C	-
Oregon†	F	D	-
Texas	D	C	-
Virginia	C	B	-

Notes: Iowa formally adopted U.S. history standards in 2009 (the state's standards received an F in this current 2011 evaluation). Rhode Island has thus far not adopted U.S. history standards. In 2003, neither Iowa nor Rhode Island had state-adopted U.S. history standards. Thus, neither state is featured in this table.

\* In 2003, our grading scale did not allow for pluses and minuses. In 2011, we altered our grading scale to include an A-minus and a B-plus. Therefore, grades for states that earned an A in 2003 and an A-minus in 2011 have, effectively, not changed. Likewise, states that earned a B in 2003 and a B-plus in 2011 have not changed.

† Oregon's content standards have not changed since 2001, prior to our last history standards review, *Effective State Standards for U.S. History: A 2003 Report Card*. However, the evaluation criteria that we used to judge standards in 2011 have been amended and improved since 2003. (See Appendix A for 2011 grading rubric.) These changes contributed to a change in Oregon's final grade: from a D to an F. The complete 2003 review can be found at: <http://www.edexcellence.net/publications-issues/publications/effectivestatehistory.html>.

TABLE B-5 • COMPARISON OF FORDHAM HISTORY REVIEWS: 1998-2011, IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER

Jurisdiction	2011 grade U.S. History	2003 grade U.S. History	2000 grade U.S. and World History	1998 grade U.S. and World History
Alabama	A-	A	B	C
Alaska	F	F	F	F
Arizona	C	A	A	N/A
Arkansas	D	F	F	F
California	A-	A	A	B
Colorado	F	D	D	D
Connecticut	F	D	D	C
Delaware	F	B	D	F
District of Columbia	A-	F	F	C
Florida	C	D	C	C
Georgia	B	B	C	D
Hawaii	C	F	F	N/A
Idaho	F	D	N/A	N/A
Illinois	D	F	F	F
Indiana	A-	A	C	C
Iowa	F	N/A	N/A	N/A
Kansas	C	B	B	F
Kentucky	D	F	D	F
Louisiana	C	D	C	C
Maine	F	F	D	D
Maryland	C	C	B	F
Massachusetts	A-	A	B	B
Michigan	B	F	F	F
Minnesota	C	F	F	F
Mississippi	F	F	C	N/A
Missouri	F	F	C	F
Montana	F	F	N/A	N/A
Nebraska	C	C	C	F
Nevada	D	C	C	N/A

Jurisdiction	2011 grade U.S. History	2003 grade U.S. History	2000 grade U.S. and World History	1998 grade U.S. and World History
New Hampshire	F	F	C	C
New Jersey	C	F	F	F
New Mexico	D	F	F	F
New York	A-	A	D	F
North Carolina	F	F	D	F
North Dakota	F	F	F	N/A
Ohio	D	D	D	D
Oklahoma	B+	B	B	D
Oregon	F	D	B	N/A
Pennsylvania	F	F	F	F
Rhode Island	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
South Carolina	A	C	C	N/A
South Dakota	D	D	C	N/A
Tennessee	C	C	D	D
Texas	D	C	B	B
Utah	C	C	C	C
Vermont	F	F	F	F
Virginia	C	B	A	A
Washington	D	F	F	F
West Virginia	D	F	C	C
Wisconsin	F	F	F	F
Wyoming	F	F	F	N/A

Notes: Data for 2003 drawn from: Sheldon Stern, *Effective State Standards for U.S. History: A 2003 Report Card* (Washington, D.C.: Thomas B. Fordham Institute, 2003). Data for 2000 drawn from: Lawrence Braden, Chester E. Finn, Jr., Lawrence S. Lerner, et al., *The State of State Standards 2000* (Washington, D.C.: Thomas B. Fordham Institute, 2000). Data for 1998 drawn from: David W. Saxe, *State History Standards* (Washington, D.C.: Thomas B. Fordham Institute, 1998).



## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

---

### **Sheldon M. Stern**

Sheldon M. Stern (PhD in history, Harvard University, 1970) taught U.S. history and African American history at the college level for more than a decade. From 1977 through 1999 he was a historian at the John F. Kennedy Library in Boston, Massachusetts, where he developed a special interest in teacher preparation and secondary-school history education. In 1992, he launched the American History Project for High School Students, a program to introduce students to the complexity of history and historical evidence. He has worked extensively with educational advocacy organizations including Core Knowledge, K<sup>12</sup>, and the Thomas B. Fordham Institute. He is the author of *Averting ‘the Final Failure’: John F. Kennedy and the Secret Cuban Missile Crisis Meetings* (2003), and *The Week the World Stood Still: Inside the Secret Cuban Missile Crisis* (2005), both in the Stanford University Press Nuclear Age Series.

### **Jeremy A. Stern**

Jeremy A. Stern (PhD in history, Princeton University, 2010) is an independent scholar and educational consultant. He is the author of several scholarly papers and articles, including “Jane Franklin Mecom: A Boston Woman in Revolutionary Times” (*Early American Studies*, Spring 2006), a study of the tumultuous life and evolving political engagement of Benjamin Franklin’s youngest sister. He also focuses on public history and has written several pieces for the *History News Network* reviewing the handling of history by popular television programs. In addition, he has worked, both independently and with Sheldon Stern, on historical content and reviews for organizations including Core Knowledge, K<sup>12</sup>, and the Thomas B. Fordham Institute.

**The Thomas B. Fordham Institute** is a nonprofit organization that conducts research, issues publications, and directs action projects in elementary and secondary education reform at the national level and in Ohio, with special emphasis on our hometown of Dayton. It is affiliated with the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, and this publication is a joint project of the Foundation and the Institute. For further information, please visit our website at [www.edexcellence.net](http://www.edexcellence.net) or write to the Institute at 1016 16th St. NW, 8th Floor, Washington, D.C. 20036. The Institute is neither connected with nor sponsored by Fordham University.

This report and others on this topic are available in full on the Institute's website: [www.edexcellence.net](http://www.edexcellence.net).

