

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).