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## **U.S. History Standards Need Radical Overhaul, New Study Reveals**

**As of Presidents' Day 2011, history standards in twenty-eight states are mediocre-to-awful; only South Carolina earns a straight 'A'**

WASHINGTON – According to a new analysis, twenty-eight states – a majority – deserve D or F grades for their U.S. history standards for primary-secondary schools. The average grade across all states is a dismal D.

South Carolina is the only state to earn a straight A for its standards, according to this review by the Thomas B. Fordham Institute. Six others – Alabama, California, Indiana, Massachusetts, New York and the District of Columbia – earn A-minuses. And three – Oklahoma, Georgia and Michigan – are in the B range.

Academic standards such as these set forth what the state's young people are expected to learn in a given subject as they pass through grades K-12. They send powerful signals to schools, teachers, parents, textbook publishers, colleges, test makers, and others, and do a great deal to shape the curriculum that children actually receive in that subject.

Sadly, only one state in five gets honors marks for their K-12 history standards. The majority of states are mediocre-to-awful in this field.

“These bleak findings tell us what we already suspected – U.S. history standards across the land are alarmingly weak,” said Fordham Institute President Chester E. Finn, Jr. “No wonder so many Americans know so little about our nation’s past. Yet this subject is essential to an educated citizenry.”

In *The State of State U.S. History Standards 2011*, content experts reviewed the U.S. history standards of the 50 states and the District of Columbia. They also reviewed the U.S. history framework of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). Each was awarded a letter grade (except for Rhode Island, which has not mandated any standards in this subject).

Reviews were conducted by Sheldon M. Stern, an historian formerly at the John F. Kennedy Library in Boston, and Jeremy A. Stern, an historian and education consultant. Standards were appraised for their “clarity and specificity” as well as their “content and rigor.”

The NAEP framework received an A-minus. For state grades, see page 2.

The Texas history standards—the subject of much contention in the Lone Star State and beyond—received a D. The reviewers found them to be a “strange fusion” of both ends of the political spectrum – an amalgam of the theory-based social studies approach usually associated with the left and a politicized—rightward—distortion of historical content.

Looking across all the reviews, the strongest history standards generally provide coherent, chronological views of historical content rather than themes; they systematically identify real people and specific events, explaining their significance; they honor historical balance and context. By contrast, the weakest standards generally ignore chronology in favor of social studies themes; minimize real people and specific events in favor of broad generalizations; seek to mold students toward specific political outlooks rather than to encourage historical comprehension or independent critical thought.

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

Every state requires its public-school students to study American history in some form and every state (except Rhode Island) has mandated standards for this subject. Yet few have the proper accountability structures in place to ensure that the standards are being taught or that students are learning their content.

“Standards in and of themselves don’t guarantee exemplary student achievement – proper implementation and accountability obviously must follow,” said Fordham Vice President Michael J. Petrilli. “But clear, consistent standards are a critical starting point. Without them, few of our children will graduate high school with a proper grasp of American history.”

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To find out more about this study, and the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, please visit [www.edexcellence.net](http://www.edexcellence.net).

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