

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.)