



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.)