

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 The document's sole concern is theoretical and conceptual learning, leaving actual historical content entirely undefined.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.)