

NEVADA • U.S. HISTORY

GRADE

D

SCORES

Content and Rigor **3/7**
Clarity and Specificity **1/3**

TOTAL SCORE

4/10

Organization

Nevada's U.S. history standards focus obsessively on theme and theory to the near exclusion of historical content. The content standards that do appear are brief and vague. And even these are broken into thematic charts and tables, scattering related material in complete defiance of historical chronology or logic.

Goals and Organization

Nevada's social studies standards are divided into four strands: history, geography, economics, and civics. Each strand is further divided into thematic subsections, called "standards," which are in turn divided into "themes." For each theme, benchmarks are provided for individual grades from K–5, and for grade blocks 6–8 and 9–12.

The history strand is divided into four standards: people, civilizations and cultures; nation building and development; social responsibility and change; and international relationships and power. Each standard is divided into "United States & Nevada" and "world" themes, and grade-level or grade-block benchmarks are provided for each theme. For grade blocks 6–8 and 9–12, the benchmarks within each theme are arranged under chronological headings (such as "Colonial America," "Antebellum America," etc.).

A separate "integrated" standards document is supplied for grade block 6–8. It adds no content, but rather reorganizes the existing benchmarks chronologically. In other words, benchmarks from the four thematic history standards are grouped together into a single chronological outline, with related geography, economics, and civics benchmarks listed in parallel columns.

Basic concepts of community and customs are introduced from Kindergarten through third grade, though little history is included. Fourth grade introduces Nevada history.

With the exception of grades six through eight, where the state provides the "integrated" standards document described above, the scattering of chronologically related content across separate standards makes it difficult to discern the specific U.S. history sequence in the various grades and grade blocks. However, an introductory "Scope & Sequence" summary indicates that fifth grade is meant to introduce American history from pre-colonization to westward expansion. Grades six through eight—focused on "interdependence & perspectives"—are, after a "short review" of the colonial period, to move from the Revolution to World War II. The high school grade block—focused on "continuity & change"—is, after a brief review of the Civil War and Reconstruction, to cover 1900 to the present. Middle and high school courses are also to stress connections between history and "contemporary" issues.

✓ DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

Nevada Social Studies Standards, U.S. history segments (2008)

Accessed from:

<http://nde.doe.nv.gov/Standards/SocialStudies/CompleteStandardsDec2008.pdf>

Nevada Integrated Middle School Social Studies Standards, U.S. history segments (2010)

Accessed from:

<http://nde.doe.nv.gov/Standards/SocialStudies/IntegratedStds7-8.FINAL.pdf>

Evaluation

Nevada's relentlessly theory-based standards seem determined to dismember all content in the name of social studies "concepts." Benchmarks related to the same era are arbitrarily divided among the various thematic standards, defying the most basic chronological exposition. Content standards are brief and vague. Even in the "integrated" standards for sixth through eighth grade, which organize the benchmarks chronologically, the lack of depth and detail undermine the document's value.

We are told that these shallow and chaotically organized standards have been designed to allow teachers "greater flexibility" in tailoring classes to the particular "needs" of their students, and in designing lessons that "capitalize" on teachers' own particular "area(s) of expertise." Yet surely standards should outline solid and common core content for *all* classrooms—not merely defer to the tastes of individual students, or to teachers' particular areas of knowledge.

The materials for Kindergarten through third grade are all but devoid of history. A search of all four history "standards" turns up little more than vague references to chronology, holidays, and sources.

Starting with the U.S. history introduction in fifth grade, some substance appears. Most benchmarks, notwithstanding, are egregiously lacking in detail and specifics; far too often, students are simply told to "understand" a given period. In the "people" standard, short and general benchmarks tell students to discuss Native American cultures, European contact, and the regional diversity of early settlement. Under "nation building," they are told to consider European exploration and rivalries, the introduction of slavery, cultural conflict, "the events that led to the Declaration of Independence," and "the causes, key events, and people of the American Revolution"—all without any required content. Under "social responsibility & change," they are to consider aspects of daily life, while under "international relationships & power" they are to discuss U.S. foreign relations. And some highly relevant material—such as the colonies' relations with Britain—is shunted into the world history section.

This confused fragmentation continues in sixth through eighth grades. Here, under the "people" theme, students are to study European contact, colonial lifestyles ("as determined by race, class, and gender"), antebellum industrialization and arts, westward expansion, and, abruptly, the social and cultural effects of the two world wars. Under "nation building," they are to cover Nevada statehood, political events of the founding era, and contributors to a national identity, including Pontiac, George Washington, and Abigail Adams. A directive follows to "identify and describe the causes, key people, and events of the

Civil War," and on through the Gilded Age and Progressivism (mentioning only industrialization) to the Great Depression.

The "social responsibility" theme then jumps back to the American Revolution (students are to understand its "political and economic causes and effects"), antebellum America (touching on the reform movements and abolitionism), Reconstruction (the Thirteenth through Fifteenth Amendments and Jim Crow), the Gilded Age and Progressivism again (mentioning the Populist and Progressive movements), and the 1920s. The "international relationships" segment has units for Colonial America, including the impact of the French and Indian War and the two world wars—*followed by* the Gilded Age and Progressivism.

This organizational chaos continues unabated through high school, though the benchmarks themselves show marginal improvements in specificity. For example, students are asked to "describe the rise of corporations and analyze working conditions in the late 19th and early 20th centuries." But such items are the exception; most remain alarmingly short on specifics or explanation, with content again scattered among the standards, jumping from era to era as thematic topics dictate.

Nevada seems to recognize the confusion all of this is apt to cause; hence the creation of the far simpler "integrated standards" for grades six through eight, which place all related benchmarks together in chronological sequence. Unfortunately, since the content is integrated only for these grades, and since they merely reorganize the existing benchmarks, the benchmarks *themselves* must be greatly improved before the integrated standards would add real value. Jefferson, Madison, Hamilton, Lincoln, and Franklin Roosevelt do not appear in Nevada's standards, integrated or otherwise. Nor do the Marshall Court, the Missouri Compromise, or McCarthyism. That list could go on and on.

Content and Rigor Conclusion

Save in the single integrated standards document, Nevada's baffling organization splits content beyond any bounds of logic or coherence. And even if the standards were rationally organized, the benchmarks themselves would still be marginally adequate at best. Substantive gaps and overly broad directives plague the entire document. While rigor improves slightly at the high school level, it remains woefully inadequate. Nevada declares, in any case, that teachers need not be bound by these standards. Only the most basic facts are apparently *required*; teachers are instead to shape courses as best meets "the needs of their students," and as best fits their "area(s) of expertise." Teachers will indeed need expertise to create sensible courses from this mish-mash and one fears that

students' true needs—such as common historical literacy—will not be met. Nevada's partial and fragmentary content earns a three out of seven for Content and Rigor. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

Clarity and Specificity Conclusion

Nevada's standards document is confusing to the point of uselessness. A visual nightmare of charts and tables makes it all but impossible to follow. Detail is sorely lacking, and the benchmarks fail to provide specifics. Individual grade-level expectations are provided only for Kindergarten through fifth grade; beyond that, they describe only grade blocks (6–8 and 9–12). Insofar as the sequence can be divined, it adheres to the flawed division of U.S. history into a single course across elementary, middle, and high schools. Save for brief reviews, earlier material is relegated to earlier grades, despite students' inevitably less developed sophistication. The "integrated" standards are far clearer—but are provided at present *only* for grade block 6–8. And, since the "benchmarks" they provide are identical, detail and specificity do not improve. Consequently, Nevada can earn no better than a one out of three for Clarity and Specificity. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)