

NEW HAMPSHIRE • U.S. HISTORY



GRADE

F

SCORES

Content and Rigor 0/7
Clarity and Specificity 0/3

TOTAL SCORE

0/10

Overview

New Hampshire’s social studies standards offer no coherent outline of U.S. history content. General themes and concepts are openly preferred over historical specifics, which are denigrated as “lengthy and fragmented list[s].” The few historical “examples”—all purely optional—defy historical sense, grouping entirely disparate issues and periods in the name of overarching themes.

Goals and Organization

New Hampshire’s social studies standards are divided into five “content strands”: civics, economics, geography, U.S./New Hampshire history, and world history. Each strand is divided into further sub-themes, or “curriculum standards.” Charts link each such standard to “suggested expectations” for grade blocks K–2, 3–4, 5–6, 7–8, and 9–12. Ten “themes” are also provided to further categorize the content (conflict and cooperation; civic ideals, practices, and engagement; people, places and environment; and so on). Finally, additional charts link these themes to concepts raised in the five content strands, and relevant themes are also noted after each expectation.

The history strands are organized thematically, not chronologically. Both U.S. and world history are divided, in every grade block, into five identical standards: political foundations and development; contacts, exchanges, and international relations; world views and value systems and their intellectual and artistic expressions; economic systems and technology; and social/cultural.

The U.S./New Hampshire history strand appears in each grade block, but no specific historical scope or time span is assigned to any grade or grade block.

Evaluation

New Hampshire’s purely thematic arrangement of content seems designed to defy historical coherence. Teachers are encouraged to use the ten broad themes “as a way of finding meaningful ways of addressing the standards and expectations and, perhaps more importantly, as a way of using the frameworks to encourage higher-order thinking in our students.” But students are, apparently, to engage in such “higher-order thinking” unburdened by anything as mundane as historical content. The expectations listed for each historical sub-theme provide no specific information on any particular events, persons, or periods. They instead lay out broad thematic issues to be considered—ways in which students might explore whatever historical specifics their teachers may happen to present. Most expectations end with a smattering of historical examples, but these only make matters worse, jamming together disparate items from different eras without explanation

✓ DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

K–12 Social Studies New Hampshire Curriculum Framework, U.S. history segments (2006)

Accessed from:

http://www.education.nh.gov/instruction/curriculum/social_studies/documents/frameworks.pdf

or context. There is no hint of a chronological outline. Worse, the state makes it clear that even these confusing and content-thin expectations “are not meant to be requirements to be taught,” and are merely “offered as concrete illustrations among many other possibilities.”

No sequence is ever defined: The few examples in the expectations refer to disparate eras in all grades. After conventional consideration of national symbols, holidays, and local history in the early grades, unusable fragments of actual history begin to appear in fifth and sixth grades. While little content is specified, the standards still manage to cite the mythical and discredited claim of Iroquois influence on the U.S. Constitution: Students may “explain how and why people have developed forms of self-government,” the examples given being “the Mayflower Compact or the Iroquois League”; or they might “explain how the foundations of American democracy are rooted in European, Native American and colonial traditions, experiences and institutions.” Vague references to the arts, economic development, and western expansion are also tossed in, all without any explanation or specifics.

In seventh and eighth grades, students continue to focus on broad issues to the exclusion of specific history. A few more examples appear, but these remain trans-historical and decontextualized to the point of inanity. An expectation asking students to “analyze the tension between states’ rights and national authority” gives, as examples, the nullification crisis of 1832 and school integration in the 1960s. Another, discussing “major United States efforts to remove European influence from the Western Hemisphere,” pairs the Monroe Doctrine and the Cuban missile crisis. A directive to “compare and contrast the rationales for entering into war with other nations” mentions just “the American Revolution or the Korean Conflict.” Other items link the XYZ affair with the Vietnam War, the Louisiana Purchase with the Marshall Plan, and the triangular trade with modern multinational corporations. The expectation coming closest to a historically sensible query asks students to “explain major attempts to force European powers to recognize and respect the sovereignty of the United States as a new nation, e.g., the Jay Treaty or the War of 1812.”

This ahistorical, if not anti-historical, pattern is identical in the high school grade block. Here, students are to analyze political parties, such as the Whigs or the Progressives; or compare the separation of church and state in early New Hampshire with the Moral Majority; or examine federalism through the Articles of Confederation and the New Deal, sectionalism through the Hartford Convention and the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, or America’s global influence through “the Bill of Rights or popular music.” Mercantilism is paired with NAFTA; Anne Hutchinson with “the silent majority”; abolitionism with the abortion debate.

It is ironic that the curriculum framework dismisses chronological and factual history as “fragmented,” when its own hyper-thematic arrangement utterly fragments any historical logic or coherence. Of course, it is made clear that teachers are under no obligation to introduce even the few, random, hopelessly decontextualized events or issues that happen to be mentioned—they (and the thematic expectations themselves) are merely suggestions.

Content and Rigor Conclusion

New Hampshire’s standards are absent of both content and rigor. No substantive content is ever outlined—students are merely to analyze themes, using whatever content their teachers choose to introduce. Since only vague (and optional) thematic issues are covered, there can be no increase in substance from grade to grade. The only sop to increasing grade-level rigor is that *more* thematic expectations are introduced in each successive grade block. Throughout, however, personal relevance—the habitual social studies approach to history—is stressed as the key aim. New Hampshire’s essentially content-less standards earn a zero out of seven for Content and Rigor. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

Clarity and Specificity Conclusion

New Hampshire’s standards make fairly clear what is expected; unfortunately, almost nothing is. It is easy enough to find the “expectations” for each grade block. But since no specific material is assigned to any specific level, there is no sequence. Course scope is all but nonexistent; the only detail is in the haphazard historical examples—and even these are optional. New Hampshire’s empty expectations cannot possibly guide teachers in structuring a course. They might well be better off—or at least less confused—with no “framework” at all. Offering no structure beyond vapid themes and generalizations, New Hampshire’s standards merit a zero out of three for Clarity and Specificity. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)