

NEW MEXICO • U.S. HISTORY

GRADE

D

SCORES

Content and Rigor **2/7**
Clarity and Specificity **1/3**

TOTAL SCORE

3/10



Overview

New Mexico provides a rudimentary historical outline for teachers and students. Sadly, the content is absurdly brief, barely managing to list important events. Worse still, the standards are too often politicized, inaccurate, or both.

Goals and Organization

New Mexico's social studies standards are divided into four strands: history, geography, civics and government, and economics. Each strand is subdivided into "benchmarks" (i.e., content areas); under each benchmark, "performance standards"—specific grade- or course-level expectations—are listed for individual grades from K–8 and for grades 9–12 as a block.

The history strand is divided into four benchmarks: New Mexico, United States, world, and skills. History performance standards under these benchmarks follow a largely chronological structure, with some thematic departures.

Kindergarten through fourth grade introduce national holidays and symbols, famous individuals, and concepts of chronology and sources.

The U.S. history sequence is presented as a single course, divided among grades five, eight, and high school. Fifth grade covers pre-settlement through the colonial era; eighth grade runs from the Revolution to Reconstruction; high school outlines Reconstruction to the present.

Evaluation

New Mexico's U.S. history outline is exceedingly brief and rudimentary. The state actually gives more space to its *physical education* standards than it does to history. In fact, the high school performance standards fill just one-and-a-half pages, the eighth grade standards a single page, and the fifth grade standards barely one-third of a page.

There are also errors of fact and emphasis and, while material is presented largely chronologically, ahistorical thematic groupings repeatedly intrude. The arbitrary division of content into strands and benchmarks confuses things even more. For example, some U.S. history material, which relates to world or New Mexico issues, turns up under those benchmarks, and not under U.S. history. Conversely, some fragments of world and New Mexico history turn up under the U.S. benchmark.

Furthermore, as in many other states, U.S. history is split into a single course over grades five, eight, and high school. Students in early grades lack sophistication, which means that

✓ DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

New Mexico Content Standards with Benchmarks and Performance Standards: Social Studies, K–12, U.S. history segments (2009)

Accessed from:

<http://www.ped.state.nm.us/standards/>

only the time periods covered in later grades can be treated or comprehended in appropriate depth. As such, modern history is given *de facto* prioritization, since it is all that high school students will study.

From Kindergarten through fourth grade, students are introduced to the basics: holidays, symbols, and famous people. Concepts of chronology and sources appear under the history strand's "skills" benchmark. Patchy coverage and tendentious emphasis are evident from the start: The selective list of important individuals includes "George Washington, Ben Franklin, César Chávez, Rosa Parks, National Association for Advancement of Colored People [NAACP], tribal leaders, [and the] American Indian Movement [AIM]"—a historically unbalanced overemphasis on minorities and minority groups.

Similar problems continue in fifth grade, where detail is again in short supply. The outline opens with exploration and colonization, listing a few specific names and motivations, before touching on interactions between Europeans and Native Americans, the introduction of slavery, and representative government/democratic practices. Regrettably, even this brief overview makes room for the false and long-discredited notion that the Iroquois League was a key influence on early American government: The examples given for early representative government are "Iroquois nation model, town meetings, [and] assemblies."

The outline for eighth grade is somewhat more substantive, but it remains unacceptably brief, and errors persist. Students are to discuss "the economic and political reasons for the American Revolution," yet the only example given is "attempts to regulate colonial trade through passage of Tea Act, Stamp Act and Intolerable Acts." Even this example lacks specifics, and the acts are cited out of chronological order. Most importantly, though, the statement itself is wrong: The issue was taxation without consent, not trade regulation (which the colonies accepted until the eve of independence). Brevity and inaccuracy continue. After passing references to the Declaration of Independence and Articles of Confederation, major debates of the Constitutional Convention are mentioned, but the only example given is "the federalist papers [*sic*]" which were written *after* the convention to promote ratification.

Washington's establishment of the cabinet and two-term presidency, Hamilton's financial plan, and the party schism are listed. But the standards then skip to the Jacksonian era, ignoring the election of 1800, the Louisiana Purchase, and the War of 1812. They touch on white male suffrage, Native American removal, abolitionism (limited to Quakers, Harriet Tubman, and the Underground Railroad), westward expansion, and the early women's movement. The Missouri and 1850 compromises are lumped together; extension of slavery to the

territories includes "Dred Scott [*sic*] decision [and] Kansas-Nebraska Act"—again out of order. A few key leaders, one battle (Gettysburg) and some social consequences of the Civil War are mentioned; Reconstruction plans are cited but not explained, along with the Thirteenth through Fifteenth Amendments and the rise of segregation. A few historical details appear, out of context, under the civics strand—and here, for a *second* time, students are asked to hail the mythical "contributions of Native Americans in providing a model that was utilized in forming the United States government (Iroquois League)."

The high school course resumes with Reconstruction and its effect, but no examples are given. What follows is more rushed and fragmentary than ever. A single list briefly raises technological change, consumerism, and the rise of "business leaders" (Rockefeller and Carnegie are the sole examples). Monopolies, urbanization, immigration, and organized labor are mentioned. Reform movements are limited to "Populists, William Jennings Bryan, Jane Addams, muckrakers" and conservation, along with "progressive reforms," "e.g., the national income tax, direct election of senators, women's suffrage, [and] prohibition"—a chronological swath covering the 1860s to the 1920s. America's "expanding role in the world during the late 19th and 20th centuries" runs from the Spanish American War through Theodore Roosevelt to World War I, with only a few scattered details. The 1920s, the Great Depression, and World War II are barely touched on. A grossly non-chronological unit on civil rights lumps together the Reconstruction amendments, *Plessy v. Ferguson*, *Brown v. Board of Education*, and *Roe v. Wade*. Post-war and Cold War issues are listed in largely thematic clusters, followed by extremely general coverage of more recent events.

The civics strand again provides some additional historical material, but that material is *not* chronologically aligned with the time span covered in the high school history course. And, in a now familiar pattern, students are to discuss for a *third* time "the philosophical foundations of the American political system in terms of the inalienable rights of people and the purpose of government, to include: Iroquois League and its organizational structure for effective governance"—which is *followed* by Locke, Blackstone, and other English precedents.

Content and Rigor Conclusion

New Mexico's standards provide a very basic factual outline of American history, providing some structure for teachers and making some effort to delineate what students are expected to know. The outline, however, is far too brief and chronologically muddled, and it contains several outright errors. Minority groups are given disproportionate attention—the insistence

on the Iroquois's alleged influence on American government is repeated throughout—while too much essential history is omitted. The unfortunate decision to split the U.S. history curriculum across grades five, eight, and high school, furthermore, means that early America is studied only by younger children with limited comprehension—a fact the standards tacitly acknowledge by specifying far fewer performance standards in fifth and eighth grades than in high school. But the modest increase in grade-level content is not especially helpful if the earlier periods are essentially written off. New Mexico's brief and flawed standards receive a two out of seven for Content and Rigor. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

Clarity and Specificity Conclusion

New Mexico provides a relatively straightforward list of required content for each grade or course level, but it requires far too little, especially in earlier grades (which cover material that is never recapitulated). The division of content into strands and benchmarks is both unnecessary and confusing. Aside from these arbitrary organizational categories, the standards are largely free from jargon—but there is no introductory or explanatory text whatsoever. Detail is often sparse or absent; too often, what is presented is biased or erroneous. New Mexico seems to recognize that substantive content outlines are necessary for teachers and students—but they could have provided a great deal more. The skimpy and sometimes poorly arranged standards earn a one out of three for Clarity and Specificity. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)