

	States with Excellent Standards			NGSS	Delaware
	District of Columbia	Massachusetts	South Carolina		
Fordham Grade	A-	A-	A-	C	C
Overview	<p>The D.C. science standards are generally clear and rigorous, with content that progresses appropriately through the grades. Virtually all of the essential K-12 science content is covered effectively and succinctly, proving that standards don't have to sacrifice coverage and depth when pursuing concision.</p>	<p>The Massachusetts science standards are easy to read and to use. Across disciplines, their quality and depth is strong. Particularly at the high school level, the standards are clear and comprehensive. There are a few minor content omissions, but no major gaps or errors.</p>	<p>South Carolina's science standards are rigorous, clear and succinct, and they outline the essential K-12 content that students need to learn. Content coverage is generally thorough, and concepts develop in logical progression over the advancing grades.</p>	<p>The NGSS fall short of excellence in several ways, including: overemphasis on practices over essential content; omission of much essential content; failure to integrate mathematics content that is essential to science learning; and use of "assessment boundaries" that put arbitrary ceilings on the content that will be assessed (and therefore taught) at each grade.</p>	<p>The Delaware science standards are generally robust, detailed, and thoughtful, and they present critical information clearly, with a minimum of jargon. Unfortunately, not all subjects are equally well covered; the document is uneven and its organization is difficult to navigate.</p>
Scientific Inquiry and Practices	<p>The scientific inquiry and methodology standards are presented as a separate strand that, while not explicitly tied to content, is generally clear and appropriately rigorous.</p>	<p>Process standards are straightforward and well integrated with content. Mathematical problem-solving is stressed along with investigation and experimentation. Also emphasized is the need for students to communicate effectively about their work in science, both orally and in writing.</p>	<p>The inquiry standards are clear and thorough. South Carolina presents inquiry standards and practices two ways. First, there is a separate "inquiry" strand included for every grade level. Additionally, each performance expectation (i.e. standard) includes multiple "indicators" that clarify both the content that students need as well as what they're meant to do with it—i.e., the "practices." Critical process standards are directly integrated with content, making the link between the two unambiguous. This integration helps to ensure that skills are taught within the context of the knowledge that students need in order to master them.</p>	<p>Good science consists of doing as well as knowing, of practices as well as content and concept. But integrating practices and content in K-12 standards requires a careful balance that NGSS fails to strike. Instead, they confer primacy on practices and pay too little attention to the knowledge base that makes those practices feasible and worthwhile. Indeed, the authors have integrated a scientific "practice" into every performance expectation, too often in ways that are forced, ill-conceived, and/or detract from the essential content that students need in order to think critically and engage in scientific inquiry.</p>	<p>The scientific-inquiry and methodology standards are generally well written, and they increase in rigor and complexity from grade span to grade span. In addition, the standards deal admirably with the practicalities of the laboratory experience, demanding attention be paid to precision and accuracy. Unfortunately, while the standards mention linking the process standards to the body of scientific knowledge, there are content gaps that would sometimes make it difficult for students to associate the results of their investigations with historical science knowledge as the standards demand.</p>

<p>Physical Science (Including Physics and Chemistry)</p>	<p>The physical science standards are clear, appropriate, and thorough. Content systematically builds from grade to grade. Students can acquire a thorough background, preparing them well for high-school-level courses. In addition, the high school physics and chemistry coverage is excellent. The one drawback is occasional inclusion of “examples” that are meant to clarify standards but are often silly.</p>	<p>Although generally solid, the physical science standards for pre-Kindergarten through eighth grade suffer from omission or short-changing of several important topics. The high school physics standards, however, are systematic, logical, and pedagogically sound, and high school chemistry is handled with refreshing depth and specificity</p>	<p>Virtually all of the essential physical science, physics and chemistry content is included and clearly progresses from grade to grade. At the high school level, however, while essential content is included, the expectations would occasionally benefit from greater specificity.</p>	<p>NGSS physical science coverage is mediocre throughout grades K–5 and declines rapidly in middle school, and still further at the high school level. Overall, the physical science standards fail to lay the foundation for advanced study in high school and beyond, and there is so little advanced content that it would be impossible to derive a high school physics or chemistry course from the content included in the NGSS.</p>	<p>Through ninth grade, the physical-science standards are generally detailed, though the division of content among the standards is odd. The high school standards, however, suffer from three serious problems: First, physics and chemistry are not treated as independent courses. Second, too many standards are overly broad, asking either too much or too little of students. Third, while some standards ask the unattainable, others arbitrarily hold students back from learning grade-appropriate content.</p>
<p>Life Science</p>	<p>The life science standards are thorough, well developed, and appropriately rigorous. They could easily serve as a model for other states.</p>	<p>Virtually all critical life science content is included and well developed in the MA standards. The coverage of evolution in grades six through eight, in particular, is both appropriate and good. High school biology content is also clear, concise, and comprehensive.</p>	<p>While coverage of evolution at the middle school level is occasionally evasive, the grades K-8 life science standards are otherwise reasonably strong. The standards for high school biology are excellent, and the treatment of evolution at this level is excellent.</p>	<p>Life science is generally solid in elementary school, but grows thin by middle and high school. Too much important content is represented only by mention or allusion within “omnibus” standards that refer to large bodies of content for which either necessary precedent in lower grades or needed detail is missing.</p>	<p>The life-science material is concise and accurate, and it contains all the important concepts and facts that a high school graduate should learn. Evolution is also treated thoroughly and accurately.</p>
<p>Earth and Space Science</p>	<p>Coverage of earth and space sciences is excellent across all grade levels. Occasionally, however, the presentation of the content is marred by examples that don’t match the rigor of the material.</p>	<p>Earth and space science is covered comprehensively, and only occasional omissions mar these otherwise strong standards.</p>	<p>With the exception of a few minor errors and overly broad standards, the South Carolina earth and space science standards and related support materials present most of the essential K-12 earth and space science content.</p>	<p>The NGSS earth and space science standards are ambitious in their scope. Unfortunately, too many standards become long laundry lists of topics, even as essential prerequisite knowledge that needs to be mastered is assumed but never specifically required or mentioned.</p>	<p>The presentation of important earth- and space-science material is generally excellent. Some important topics are glossed over, however, or omitted entirely (e.g., plate tectonics).</p>

Clarity and Specificity

The D.C. science standards are clear, succinct, and specific. The one minor drawback is the inclusion of “examples” (instructional activities that can help students master particular concepts) that are sometimes weak and occasionally absurd, particularly in high school.

The Massachusetts standards are clearly presented and easy to navigate. Occasionally, additional detail would help clarify what is actually expected of students.

The South Carolina standards are presented clearly and are nicely linked to support documents, which add significant value by providing specific details and clarifying what, precisely, students should know and be able to do.

The presentation of the NGSS is cumbersome and difficult to navigate. In addition, too many individual performance expectations are vague and poorly worded, with broad references to concepts that lack specific guidance about what, precisely, students should know and be able to do.

Most of the standards are clearly written and free from distracting jargon. In addition, the state clearly labels the indicators that will be assessed and indicates which of those assessed standards is most important. Unfortunately, the organization and presentation of the content is often confusing.