

Colorado

(Sources: *Colorado Model Content Standards for History, 1995; for Geography, 1995; for Civics, 1998; for Economics, 1998; and Suggested Grade Level Expectations for Civics, Geography, and History, 2001*, Colorado Department of Education)

The five criteria: An overview

Are the essentials of a civic core specified clearly?	Are the topics teachable within the allotted timeframe?	Do the documents provide a scope and sequence?	Is the essential content required of all students?	Are the important facts and ideas presented coherently across subjects?
★	☆	★	☆	★

Standards that largely meet the criteria are designated with a full star [★]; standards that partially meet the criteria are designated with a half star [☆]; and standards that do not meet the criteria are designated with an empty star [☆].

Summary:

The Colorado standards partly satisfy Criterion #1. They have a number of central, specific topics, but too few of the right topics for a civic core of education. On Criterion #2, teachability, the combined topics and headings for the four subjects cannot be covered even hurriedly in the time schools have. On Criterion #3, Colorado benchmarks imply a grade-by-grade order of courses through grade eight: Colorado history in fourth grade; U.S. history to Reconstruction in fifth; Western hemisphere studies from 2000 BC to the present in sixth; Eastern hemisphere studies, 2000 BC to the present in seventh; U.S. history of the 19th century in eighth. Standards for grades nine to twelve call for full survey courses in both U.S. and world history in those years. On Criterion #4, however, Colorado calls itself a local-control state, and so does not explicitly require these courses. On Criterion #5, despite separate documents for each subject, some connections are made among civics, geography, and history, particularly in middle school, earning a designation of “partially met”.

Particulars:

Colorado is an example of topic overload by four different teams writing four separate documents, with too little coordination. In grade eight, “Suggested Grade Level Expectations” for civics, geography, and history add up to 217 topics, needing at least a day or two apiece simply to cover. The 1998 economics standards imply some 40 more. Many general topics could take a week or longer, with a full day just to define (e.g., in geography, “analyze the reasons for divisions and cooperation among peoples, in terms of geography” and “examine various social, political, and economic regions and see how they are different from past to present”). In grade eight, U.S. history from c. 1800 to the present, are such topics as “trace patterns of change and continuity in the history of the United States and compare the laws of various people of various cultures from long ago until 21st Century America” and “describe how the social roles and the characteristics of social organization have both changed and endured in the United States throughout its history.”

Standards for grades nine to twelve list all world and U.S. history eras from beginnings to the present. But most topics deal with process rather than specific knowledge, and general

questions abound (e.g., in geography, “compar[e] and contrasting how and why different groups in society view places and regions differently,” and in history, “analyz[e] the relationship between economic factors and social and political policies throughout United States history”). The Western and Eastern hemisphere courses in grades six and seven are badly served by geography and civics topics that are ill-aligned with the regions supposedly being studied.

In sum, the raw materials for a civic core of education could be dug out of these documents, including many critical topics that are cited as examples. Colorado’s standards and grade level expectations could easily be reordered, integrated, and made teachable by a single new team of teachers and scholars using these documents as first drafts.