

Connecticut

(Source: *Social Studies Curriculum Framework*, Connecticut State Department of Education, May 1998)

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:

This document fares badly on the five criteria for judging the strength of state standards in education for democracy. Under Criterion #1, it has almost no specific historical, political, or civics content and its headings are general and sweeping. No common core of content could be derived from it. And its “standards” are so vast in scope that Criterion #2 on teachability can not be met. On Criterion #3, Connecticut has local control. The document is said to be intended only to provide guidance to curriculum writers, not to set grade-by-grade objectives that prescribe curriculum. On Criterion #4, social studies is not tested; and there is no sign that particular content is to be offered to all Connecticut students. Under Criterion #5, history, geography, civics, and economics are not integrated but cut apart, their topics scattered among fifteen separate “standards.”

Particulars:

There are four standards for history, civics, and geography, three for economics. Of history’s four, only #2, “Local, United States and World History” touches on content. Under it appears a list of eleven eras for U.S. history and nine for world history. The other standards are “Historical Thinking,” “Historical Themes,” and “Applying History.” Two items in performance standards for grades five to eight name scattered events: “Demonstrate an in-depth understanding of major events and trends of United States history (e.g., the American Revolution, the Civil War, industrialization, the Great Depression, the cold war)” and “an in-depth understanding of selected events representing major trends of world history (e.g., emergence of new centers of agrarian society in the 3rd and 2nd millennia BCE, the Black Death, the Colombian voyages, the French Revolution, World War II).”

For grades nine to twelve, students are to “demonstrate an understanding of major events and trends in world history, United States history and local history from all historical periods and from all the regions of the world.” In standard #3 (themes), the only specifics are “tenets of world religions that have acted as major forces throughout history, including, but not limited to, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, and indigenous popular religions.” These are all the specifics in the document, except for the Declaration of Independence and Constitution, under civics standard #5, “locate at least 50 countries” in geography standard

#12, and “gross domestic product” in economics standards #13 and #14.

The Connecticut document, on its own, is not useful for teaching. Dozens of standards amount to abstract exhortations, each of which could take weeks to satisfy—e.g., “Demonstrate an understanding of the ways race, gender, ethnicity and class issues have affected individuals and societies in the past,” or “Analyze and evaluate the significance of major U.S. foreign policies and major international events and conditions over time.” Some of the skills and analyses are derived from the national standards models for history, geography, and economics, but Connecticut standards writers fail to select essential specifics from among those massive collections. They simply leave most of them out. Between the equally unteachable extremes of too few specifics and too many, they chose the former. The result offers little guidance for classroom instruction.