

District of Columbia

(Source: *Standards for Teaching and Learning: Social Studies, with Benchmarks and Performance Standards*, District of Columbia Public Schools, 2000)

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?
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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 is missing several of the critical topics for civic education and, thus, only partly meets Criterion #1. On Criterion #2, the specified topics plus numberless unnamed topics implied by general headings, cannot be taught in the hours available. On Criteria #3 and #4, the District does set a grade-by-grade sequence of required middle and high school courses: U.S. history to 1800 in grade five; “Eastern Hemisphere Geography/World Cultures” and “Western Hemisphere Geography,” grades six and seven; U.S. history 1800 to 1900, grade eight; D.C. history and government and world geography in grade nine; world history survey from origins to the present, grade ten; U.S. history 1900 to the present, grade eleven; American government, grade twelve. On Criterion #5, expert teachers could integrate subjects in the history-based courses of grades five, eight, ten, and eleven, but the grades six, seven, and nine geography/culture courses have no links to historical context.

Particulars:

Historical content is weaker for being scattered in seven strands rather than integrated in narrative context. And all subjects are confused by a three-column format: “Performance Standards,” “Essential Skills,” and “Technology Integration.” The last seems only to be tech-industry advertising, endlessly listing the same exercises in all grades with no link to subject matter. The first two headings mean little; at times critical specifics fall under standards and at other times under skills. Geography’s half of grade nine is largely wasted, repeating material from grades six and seven. This time would be better used for integrated world history/geography courses—as some states and many countries do to avoid the always unteachable grade ten prehistory-to-now high school survey. Though mixed in columns and out of chronological order, world history topics are fairly complete but often too generally stated. It is all the more important that the grade ten course be preceded by world history/geography up to 1750 or so in middle school, with some time spent for review in high school. Otherwise, modern times will not be reached.

The District’s overall sequence for U.S. history in grades five, eight, and eleven is well arranged, allowing time in high school for twentieth-century studies in depth. As in world history, a fair number of crucial topics are to be found, especially under history’s seventh

strand in each grade. But they are often out of order or hidden behind broad headings. Others appear in the one-semester grade nine course on District of Columbia history and the one-semester grade twelve course on American government, with its sources of American political thought, from the Magna Carta and the English Bill of Rights onward to the works of Hobbes, Locke, Blackstone, Montesquieu, and Rousseau.

As is the case with documents from many of the states, the District of Columbia's standards contain much of the raw material for a civic core of education in politics and citizenship. A new working group could reconsider topic priorities, cut back its overloaded courses, eliminate the wastage in grades six and seven, and clarify the document's format, chronology, and broad headings.