

Kansas

(Source: *The Kansas Curricular Standards for Civics-Government, Economics, Geography, and History*, July 1999, Kansas State Board 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:

Along with those of Alabama, Arizona, and California, the Kansas standards have been highly rated. On Criterion #1, they are specific for all subjects; the civics-government and history items are written in clear English, but the economics and geography strands use overly specialized vocabularies. On Criterion #2, course content is very overloaded. In an attempt at setting priorities, numbers of items are marked as “Recommended indicators to be assessed by Kansas Social Studies Assessment,” but with mixed effects, as noted below. Under Criteria #3, the state suggests a kindergarten to twelfth-grade course order. This reinforced by state testing at grades six, eight, and eleven meeting Criterion #4, at least in part. On Criterion #5 and the issue of integration, the four strands are cut apart. The items under civics/government can easily be coordinated with history topics and eras, as can some geography items. Economics is largely separate and abstract.

Particulars:

Kansas recommends U.S. history to 1800 for grade five, the nineteenth century for grade eight, and the twentieth for grade eleven. World history begins in grade six to c. 1600, too long a span for memorable teaching at any school level. World geography takes up the seventh grade, when a two-year meld of history and geography in grades six and seven would allow better teaching of both subjects. One high school year of world history, in grade nine or ten, runs from early civilizations to the present, an unteachable survey almost sure never to reach recent decades. Indeed, only two extremely general topics are marked as eligible for testing after 1900. Among topics listed but not marked are World Wars I and II, Communism, Fascism, the cold war, the rise of new nations after 1945, the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the world struggle for human rights. Recent Kansas tests are reported to have adhered closely to the priorities set in this document, and the suggested kindergarten to twelfth-grade scope and sequence is being adopted by local districts.

The history and civics topics are full and specific. Almost everything important to democratic education is mentioned, but still can be lost in the forest of topics. When subject writing teams work apart from each other, as in Kansas, the limits of school time can be forgotten. Economics and geography are overloaded with topics drawn from their national standards, which are often repeated throughout grades five to twelve, even though geography has grade seven to itself and economics is a senior elective. For example, in grades five and six, of

113 main topics (most with several substantial subtopics) for the four subjects, economics and geography have 40 main topics, but the fifth-grade U.S. history and sixth-grade world history courses, ostensibly the core subjects of these grades, have but 55. In general, civics topics and priorities are modest in number, fit well with U.S. history items, and are age-appropriate.

U.S. history, grades five, eight and eleven

The Old World backgrounds to the colonial and revolutionary periods do not appear in any U.S. history course. Civics lists the Magna Carta, but not as a priority. The major religions, Greek and Roman political ideas and institutions, feudalism and the Magna Carta, the English Revolution and Bill of Rights do appear as priority items in world history. Grade five U.S. history has but six priority items: importance of leaders (named); causes of the Revolution; the Declaration of Independence; the Articles of Confederation; the Constitution as “fundamental law;” and “key ideas in the Preamble.” Items listed without priority include the colonies; the introduction of slavery; “key conflicts” such as “class conflict, rural versus settled;” the key compromises in writing the Constitution (all named); the structure of government; the Bill of Rights; and the importance of Washington’s presidency. Students, then, could be taking a substantial course, or a curiously light one, depending on local attitudes toward the tests.

Grade eight Kansas and U.S. history has 25 priority items. Topics without priority include the birth of political parties, with main issues before and after 1800; immigration before and after the Civil War; pre-Civil War reform movements (“abolitionism, transcendentalism, women’s suffrage”); the rise of big business and industry; the Spanish-American War and the Philippines debate. Again, the grade eight course could be stronger without the weight of 32 civics/economics/geography priorities, none of which is specific to the nineteenth century. The grade eleven Kansas and U.S. history course has but ten priority items, three for Kansas and seven for U.S. history in the twentieth century, as against fifteen for economics and geography. Among the listed but unprioritized items are the home effects of WWI; the consumer and Jazz Age culture of the 1920s; the U.S. as superpower after WWII; civil rights struggles; the Korean and Vietnam wars; the USSR’s fall; and contemporary issues. Seven priorities are far too few for a one-year junior course; they invite seriously inadequate treatment of forces affecting students’ lives.

World history in grades six and nine or ten

As noted, grade six world history is too long (prehistory to c. 1600) and its mere seven priority items are squeezed by 21 priorities for economics and geography. Not given priority are “strengths and weaknesses of Greek democracy;” the fall of Rome’s republic; the causes for the fall of the Roman Empire; the beliefs of Judaism, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, and Islam; the Crusades and the Reformation; European colonial empires, mercantilism, and slavery; the effects of the Columbian exchange. World history students are to know “by the end of the eleventh grade,” from their grade nine or ten survey course, fourteen items eligible for testing. These fill holes in the grade six course: Greek political ideas (Plato’s Republic, Aristotle’s six forms of government) and practice (direct democracy, the effects of demagogues); the beliefs of major religions; the medieval origins of limited government. But again, high school world history is much overloaded. History and civics in general are constricted by the failure to integrate the four subjects and by limited numbers of test-eligible items. Their topics, test-eligible and not, rank with the very best in the country for both U.S. and world history. Yet without more classroom time for required studies in world history/ Western civilization, especially since the French and Industrial revolutions, the Kansas standards cannot provide all citizens with equal access to political knowledge.