

# Michigan

(Source: *Michigan Curriculum Framework*, Michigan Department of Education, no date, with pages on social studies, a reformat of *Michigan Framework for Social Studies Education: Content Standards*, adopted by the State Board of Education, July 19, 1995)

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## The five criteria: An overview

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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:

On Criterion #1, Michigan's framework merely lists titles of ten eras of U.S. history (none for the world) and cites no persons, events, ideas, or institutions, and mentions only the Declaration of Independence and Constitution in civics. On Criterion #2, the substance behind its sweeping "benchmarks" could not be covered in the time schools have. On Criterion #3, the only sign of course order is that five U.S. history eras to 1877 are listed. Criterion #4 is classified as partly met since Michigan administers state-developed tests at grades five, eight, and eleven, which are said to have "identified the 'essential content' for all social studies disciplines." On Criterion #5, there is no real integration among the seven separate social studies strands.

## Particulars:

A typical benchmark for middle school U.S. history, under history standard #2, says "Use narratives and graphic data to describe the settings of significant events that shaped the development of Michigan as a state and the United States as a nation during the eras prior to Reconstruction." The next is "Identify and explain how individuals in history demonstrated good character and personal virtue." The same two benchmarks appear for high school, with the first revised only to read "since Reconstruction." This first question is repeated under history standard #3, substituting "primary and secondary sources" for "narratives and graphic data."

A benchmark for world history in middle school is "Select conditions in various parts of the world and describe how they have been shaped by events from the past." For high school, a benchmark says only "Identify some of the major eras in world history and describe their defining characteristics." A high school geography benchmark is "Describe how major world issues and events affect various people, societies, places, and cultures in different ways," and another is "Explain how events have causes and consequences in different parts of the world." By its nature, civics does a bit better, especially in middle school. Benchmarks ask for the origins of ideas in the Declaration of Independence, the purposes and provisions of the Constitution and functions of federal institutions. High school benchmarks tend to the abstract (e.g., "Decide what the relationships should be between the United States and inter-

national organizations [none named]” and “Analyze causes of tension between the branches of government”).

The Michigan standards provide little guidance to school districts and teachers of where to start, what to select or leave out, and what is crucial or relatively unimportant. It is not clear how meaningful tests could be derived from these materials. And, indeed, it appears that the state’s tests—not its standards or curriculum resources—are really driving what is called “a very consistent de facto sequence of instruction.”