

Missouri

(Sources: *Framework for Curriculum Development in Social Studies, K-12, 1996*; and *Content Specifications for Statewide Assessment by Standard: Social Studies Grades 4, 8, and 11, 1999*, Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary 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 second document above says it “is designed to give social studies item writers and teachers direction with regard to what is ‘fair game’ for assessment in social studies.” It supercedes the 1996 framework, which it says “offers constructive advice” on the purposes of social studies, and on “guiding questions,” skills, and activities. As the operative “standards” document, it partly meets Criterion #1, with clearly-stated though general topics from which teachers could draw a common core of learning for citizenship. But on Criterion #2, the large number of general topics under seven “standards” strands (constitutional democracy; American history; world history; governance systems; economic concepts; geography; relationships of individual and groups to institutions and traditions; and tools of social science inquiry) overflow the bounds of time. Criteria #3 is partly met, with lists of benchmarks in three columns for grades four, eight, and eleven, dividing U.S. history between middle and high school at c. 1880 and world history at c. 1450. Criterion #4 is also partly met, since the existence of statewide assessments implies that content is required of all students. Criterion #5 on integration is unmet. Only the civics standards have some links to the U.S. and world history eras being taught.

Particulars:

Missouri deserves credit for admitting that its 253-page framework of 1996 is unteachable and untestable, very much overstuffed with abstractions as in others shaped by the 1994 national social studies standards. It is extremely complex, without priorities. Its “perspectives,” “strands,” “guiding questions,” diagrams of goals and objectives, and sample learning activities may at times help teachers, but only after they choose essential content on which to apply them. Missouri’s “fair game” selection represents a good start, but is unevenly done. Each standard’s topic list seems written by different authors not in touch with each other and relying too much on the national standards of each discipline—while ignoring the limited time and classroom conditions teachers must work under.

As elsewhere, this is obvious in the economics and geography standards. The grade four economics benchmarks are wholly unrealistic; the grade eight items resemble a typical senior elective in high school; and the grade eleven items are pitched at college level. Geography follows suite. Its items take two full pages, more than any other standard, and impose the academic concepts and vocabulary of national geography standards as early as grades kindergar-

ten to four. Its detailed demands under grades eight and eleven are all but identical, the authors making no effort to help teachers and test writers decide when to teach or test what. Seasoned classroom teachers apparently had too little influence on the design of these two subjects.

For standards #6 and #7, “Relationships of the Individual and Groups to Institutions” and “Traditions, and Tools of Social Science Inquiry,” the column headings for grades four, eight, and eleven make plain that the items listed are to be tested “within the context of assessment modules that deal with history, geography, government, and economics.”

Missouri sets a good example with this statement. Items under standard #6 are indeed best taught by study of history, biography, the social sciences, and literature. And social studies skills are best honed when applied to specific subject matter content. The problem of selecting what is important, however, is only partly solved by the benchmarks/topics under the five other standards. The two civics standards, “Constitutional Democracy” and “Governance Systems” (largely comparative government), if taught in relation to U.S. and world history, may be conveyed in the school time available. The grade eight benchmarks for the former assume that students have a course in U.S. history heavy on the founding era. And the grade eleven benchmarks ask for study of sources such as the Magna Carta, the Mayflower Compact, Enlightenment ideas (Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Montesquieu), as well as the Declaration of Independence, the Articles of Confederation, the Constitution, the Federalist papers, and the Bill of Rights. The English Revolution is left out of both the civics and history standards.

The U.S. and world history benchmarks remain general, covering the usual textbook-like chapter and section headings. The next step, selecting the specifics needed to teach the benchmarks, could be taken without serious overloading of the U.S. history courses, presumably in grades eight and eleven. Grade eight has 22 benchmarks, averaging eight days for each in an entire school year of roughly 180 days. Grade eleven has 25 benchmarks (the first five reviewing the pre-1877 period), for an average of six teaching days each. With these numbers, teachers could choose some benchmarks to do in depth and have time to do the others more briefly. The fourth grade’s eleven benchmarks are reasonable; all could be done in age-appropriate ways.

By its nature, world history poses more problems. Grade four’s column has no benchmarks for it. The grades five-eight column has 26 major topics/benchmarks, more sweeping than those for U.S. history, from the river civilizations to c. 1450. These can be made more specific and teachable, but only if both grades six and seven are devoted to integrated history/geography studies, giving about half of the benchmarks to each. Vital topics need to be added here and could be, without overloading. At present, for example, there is no mention of world religions. “Greek civilization and Roman empire” are a single topic. The “origins of democracy” benchmark stands alone. The ideas and fate of Athenian democracy, the overthrow of the Roman Republic and the fall of Imperial Rome are left out. “Feudalism” is listed twice, in Japan and Europe, but with no word on its significance for limited, constitutional government.

High school world history, presumably a single year, cannot be taught from 1450 to the present in serious, engaging ways, especially as the grade eleven benchmarks begin with a review of the ancient and medieval worlds. The benchmarks are general and vast. Teachers get less guidance than from a textbook’s table of contents. This is the most serious flaw in the Missouri document, all but guaranteeing that teachers never reach close to the present day. The obvious steps are to move the starting date to no earlier than 1750 and to add the essential specifics of political history that American citizens need. In sum, Missouri has made progress since 1996, but much still needs to be slimmed and clarified.