

Nebraska

(Source: *Nebraska K-12 Social Studies Standards, May 8, 1998*, Nebraska 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?
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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:

Like Montana, Nebraska also calls itself a local control state. But in contrast to Montana, its standards are highly specific across grade spans kindergarten to one, two to four, five to eight, and nine to twelve, allowing for local academic content that is “the same, equal to, or exceeding in rigor” the state standards.

This document meets Criterion #1, with clearly-worded specific items in history, politics, and civics for citizen education. An excellent core of common learning could be designed from it, but only by much pruning of the number and scope of topics; which is apparently underway. For now, it does not meet Criterion #2: like other specific listings, it overflows schools’ available instructional time.

Criterion #3 is partly met; the document does not recommend or imply a course order, but only end-of-grade-span topic listings. Criterion #4 is also partially met. Whether essential content—if it is chosen—is to be required of all students will depend upon how closely local curricula and tests are aligned with these standards. “Equal to” and “exceeding in rigor” may be defined in several ways, not necessarily “the same as.” On Criterion #5, topics in government, economics, and geography are limited to each discipline but are fewer in number than in most strand-organized documents. The topics for U.S. and world history include major aspects of geography, economics, and politics for each era, so there is much integration.

Particulars:

The main problem here is drastic overload of topics, which begins in the kindergarten through fourth grades and becomes progressively worse. The listed topics for the grades five and eight U.S. history courses, which mistakenly try a complete survey from pre-exploration to the present, would require some 180 separate items, plus no fewer than 50 under the civics and economics topics. Grades five-eight world history contains some 105 major topics, and high school world history, trying to cover an unteachable span of time from 1000 A.D. to the present, has no fewer than 135, including, for example, “The social structure, significance of citizenship, and development of democracy in the city-state of Athens” and “The rise, aggression, and human costs of totalitarian regimes in the Soviet Union, Germany, Italy, and Japan.” High school U.S. history, yet another survey from pre-exploration to the present, has some

170 topics, such as “The struggle for ratification of the Constitution, the Federalist Papers, and anti-Federalists’ arguments” and “The origins of the Cold War and the foreign and domestic consequences” and “Comparing the positions of political parties and interest groups on major issues.”

As Nebraska’s social studies standards are now being reviewed and revised, a major improvement could be achieved by segmenting both the U.S. and world history courses by eras between upper middle and high school grades. The present surveys, under added pressure from numerous standards for civics, economics, and geography, will not allow the study of selected topics in depth, or for the thoughtful exercise of the skills in historical analysis and presentations emphasized in the present document. And it is doubtful that any of the survey courses could ever reach the present. Almost all necessary content is here, but is needlessly hurried and often repeated.