

New Mexico

(Source: *New Mexico Social Studies Content Standards and Benchmarks*, June 22, 2001, New Mexico 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:

New Mexico discarded a prior effort with few specifics and only abstract standards and benchmarks, often unrelated to each other. This newer document meets Criterion #1. A common core of learning can be derived from its civics and history content, and most of it is specific and clearly written. Whether the required knowledge could be taught within school time, Criterion #2, will depend on whether districts can choose among topic emphases. On Criterion #3, New Mexico joins the few states ready to help teachers plan an articulated curriculum with a grade-by-grade progression of studies with specific performance standards, kindergarten to grade eight. On Criterion #4, statewide assessment, with high school tests determining eligibility for graduation, implies that common content must be offered to all. Criterion #5 is partly met. New Mexico is one of the few states aligning certain civics, economics, and geography content with eras taught in history.

Particulars:

The document is arranged by four standards: history, geography, civics and government, and economics. Each has broad benchmarks for the grade spans kindergarten to grade four, five to eight, and nine to twelve (e.g., for the ninth to twelfth grades in history: “Analyze and evaluate the impact of major eras, events, and individuals in United States history since the Civil War and Reconstruction”). Under the benchmarks are detailed “Performance Standards,” grade by grade. The content to be presented in each grade is spelled out. Grade four emphasizes New Mexico history; grade five, U.S. history to c. 1800; grade six, world history through the Middle Ages; grade seven, a mix of civics, economics, geography, and New Mexico history and politics; grade eight, U.S. history to Reconstruction. Grades nine–twelve are not differentiated, but include U.S. history from Reconstruction to the present, and world history from the Renaissance, too long a survey for studies in depth—or for getting to the present.

Civics items are consistently linked with historical eras, from Greece and Rome, the English Bill of Rights, and Enlightenment thinkers to modern comparative government, but not so the political implications of major world religions and ethical systems, whose beliefs appear only in grade six ancient history. Nor do U.S. history items clarify religion’s influence on American thought and politics. Otherwise, the civic and political content of U.S. history

and civics includes almost everything a citizen ought to know, and a modest paring-down would render it teachable. As always, world history is another matter. Grade six has 55 separate topics (not counting examples) in history alone, several of which need at least a week. Adding 44 topics in civics, economics, and geography makes too many for school time. High school world history has 100 such topics, plus demanding skills to be practiced, presumably squeezed into a single year. Despite its length, a few major items are left out of this survey course (e.g., stages of the French Revolution and the contrasts to ours; nineteenth-century “isms,” and the democrats’ defeat in Russia and Germany), but most needed ideas and events are present.

Setting priorities and redating world history come next. If carefully done by experienced teachers and scholars, New Mexico’s new standards will rank among the best for the political education of citizens.